Creating an Ethics of Sexuate Difference: Looking at the philosophies of Luce Irigaray and Hannah Arendt together in order to develop new foundations for the future of feminist theory

by

Nadine Sjoukje Picone

Bachelor of Arts (Hon)

School of Humanities | College of Arts, Law and Education

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania, June 2019

Contents

Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Authority of Access

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying and communication in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968.*

Signed this 23rd day of November 2018

Nadine Sjoukje Picone

Acknowledgements

There is a small army – unfortunately too many to name here – who generously gave me their aid and support in writing this thesis. A colossal thank you to all of you who helped bring this project to fruition. However, there are a certain few whose input and guidance were absolutely vital. Foremost, among them, my primary supervisor, Dr Lucy Tatman, to whom I wish to express my eternal thanks and gratitude for expertly and selflessly guiding me throughout my academic career from undergrad to postgrad and for being a constant source of wisdom, support and encouragement. Also, I express great thanks to my supervisor, Dr Louise Richardson-Self, who has helped me see this thesis through from start to end, providing invaluable feedback and advice throughout the process. A huge thank you also to Professor Luce Irigaray who selflessly took the time and effort to work with me in clarifying certain aspects of her thought. Thanks, too, to Professor Jeff Malpas for his teachings on Heidegger, Dr Leila Toiviainen and Dr Richard Corry for their involvement and assistance.

Outside of the academic supervisory structure, I have received no greater support and encouragement than that from my mother, Sjoukje Picone, who, aside from her never-ending love, patience and support, tirelessly read each one of my many thesis drafts, and never failed to provide me with constructive, intelligent and illuminating feedback which help shaped my work. No thank you will ever be enough Mum.

An enormous thank you, too, to my partner Dave Sudmalis for his unflagging support, patience, and encouragement (and for the special delivery banana blueberry pancakes!).

Further, I extend my especial gratitude to my dear friends and philosophy school colleagues, Cynthia Cameron and Leesa Wisby, who spent many hours reading over my work and engaging me in fruitful discussions which helped me enormously in understanding my topic. In addition, I send a big thank you to my employer and friend, David Rees, for his enthusiastic encouragement and timely reminders to “stick with your thesis”.

Lastly, thank you to my canine companion Lucy (aka Archie) who, despite my workload, insisted I continue to take the time to enjoy the simple pleasures of our walks together in St David’s Park.

For my parents, Sjoukje and Michael

Chapter 1 – Introduction

> 'We have a great deal to do. But how much better to have a future in front of us, rather than some new version of the past.' (Irigaray, 1993: 21)

The western world, though exceedingly privileged in a myriad of ways, nevertheless gives rise to a culture that is an ill fit for many of its inhabitants. In fact, not being tailored to any one person's measurements, it is arguably to varying extents an ill fit for all. When viewed through the neoliberalist lens so popular in the west, it may appear that the constrains of western culture simply boil down to the restrictions placed on one's freedom in order that they do not impinge on the freedom of others - a necessary requirement in any highly populated, functioning society, and certainly, in my view, an ethically desirable one.

However, if we can manage to step outside the reigning paradigms of western thought for a moment, we are afforded an entirely different view. It becomes clear that the necessary limitations on one's freedom are not the cause of any perceived cultural disaffection. Rather, as we shall see, they are part of its remedy. The actual problem is something so insidious that it is difficult to grasp even when facing it head on and, thus, almost impossible to name. Oppression would seem to be the term best suited to the phenomena, yet even this term is too ambiguous in nature to allow us to properly get a handle on what we are experiencing.

In other words, the circumstances of oppression peculiar to the west so deeply immerse its inhabitants that they lack the clarity of distance required to adequately see it, let alone satisfactorily name it. Arguably, however, they *feel* it. I believe that we in the west are in the grip, whether tightly or loosely, of a multi-faceted oppression which, regardless of what shape it takes, comprises at its core an unequal power structure where, basically stated, one gains their benefit and growth at the expense and diminishment of another.

And though this situation, wherein we are qualitatively categorised as either a majority or a minority – i.e., as either more or less human – is the subject of extensive, expertly researched and deeply thought out theory, especially within many of the feminist strands of philosophy, I imply its ongoing namelessness because its root causes are still not adequately recognised within mainstream western philosophies. Or, in other words, though there are substantial,

invaluably complex and enlightening bodies of theory pertaining to western oppression, much of this work remains at the periphery of western philosophical interest. In trying to draw such theory towards the centre of the western philosophical cannon, I have chosen to focus on certain key concepts within the respective philosophies of Luce Irigaray and Hannah Arendt as, for me, they are especially illuminating. And this only intensifies when the work of these two thinkers is brought together within the one theoretical framework.

That is, by drawing on certain key concepts within Arendt's and Irigaray's bodies of work, I propose to construct a particular kind of feminist ethics. To here explain my understanding of ethics, I see ethics as the way we choose to conduct ourselves among the other people, living creatures, ecosystems, plant-life, etc. with whom we share the planet. I seek to reinforce a feminist ethics wherein each person shapes their conduct by according all other persons with intrinsic human worth, valuing human differences, maintaining a gratitude for the sheer givenness of life and upholding a respect for the earth. Moreover, as I understand the two cornerstones of current world crises to be identified in Irigaray's work on the male symbolic order of the west, and in Arendt's work on the widespread suppression of human uniqueness, I have chosen these aspects of each thinker's philosophy to construct the feminist ethics I am seeking to achieve.

Accordingly, what I propose to achieve in this thesis is to use the existing basic framework of thought which places at is centre the unequal power dynamics characteristic of the west and bring firmly within its boundaries certain combined tenets of the philosophies of Luce Irigaray and Hannah Arendt respectively. Namely, I will focus on Luce Irigaray's theory of sexuate difference [1] and Hannah Arendt's theory of human plurality in order to reveal that western oppression, irrespective of what form it takes, has its roots in a cultural practice that *ab initio* conceptually erases the female sex and, in turn suppresses the fact of each person's irreplaceable and invaluable uniqueness.

[1] When Luce Irigaray began her feminist philosophical project, she referred to her ethics as one of *sexual* difference. Yet, in her later works she has adopted the term *sexuate* difference. She explained to me that the reason for the change in terminology was due to the overwhelming connotations concerning the sex-drive with the world 'sexual', which obstructed her readers and students from properly comprehending the complexity of her ethics. Thus she changed her wording to 'sexuate' as it more readily denotes the fact of differently sexed bodies and the sexed morphologies which stem from them, of which the sex-drive is just *one* of a multitude of aspects. Accordingly, I have also adopted the term 'sexuate ethics' throughout this thesis, save and except for direct quotes taken from Irigaray's earlier writings in which she uses the world 'sexual'.

In other words, my focus will be on analysing a limited number of key concepts within each thinker's work, most notably sexuate difference and plurality. Thus, it is not my intention to engage their work as a whole. Rather it is my intention to engage with only those elements of each thinker's thought that I deem most important for a feminist ethics, and which could be brought into dialogue with each other, for example bringing Arendt's earth/world concepts into dialogue with Irigaray's nature/culture concepts. Further, as I am seeking to construct a feminist ethic, I have chosen to lead my analysis with the work of Irigaray as the feminist thinker. Through this kind of analysis, we shall see that such oppression is not innate to the human condition, nor to the western world. It can be otherwise. It is ethically desirable that it be otherwise.

With Irigaray and Arendt, I share the hope that it is possible for us to transform western culture - to ultimately rid it of the hazardous power structures and oppressions which to varying extents dehumanise all within their reach, and in their place create truly shared world cultures wherein each person can live and become as an utterly unique, sexuately specific, fully liberated human being. From this research, I hope to pave the way for a new feminist ethic – one of sexuate plurality – which will more readily shed light on our current situation in the west and better equip us to challenge its inequities.

I shall begin this task by turning to the thought of Luce Irigaray in Chapter 2. That is, I will put forward a coherent outline of her philosophical viewpoint and its core tenet of sexuate difference. Namely, for Irigaray human existence at its most foundational level is a *sexed corporeal existence*. Hence Irigaray's claim that sexuate oppression is the basis from which all other kinds of human oppression stem. Throughout this thesis, I will be following Irigaray on this point. Thus, it is not my intention to challenge Irigaray on this issue, but to engage Irigaray and Arendt in conversation wherein the primacy of our sexed corporeal existence is brought to the fore.

Accordingly, I will make clear Irigaray's claim that western culture defines women against the accepted standard of 'Man' and as a consequence, women are saddled with the label of 'substandard'. Further, I will demonstrate the validity of Irigaray's contention that, though western ideologies apparently purport the existence of two sexes, male and female, there is actually only one sex within the cultural imaginary of the west: male. For it is the male who

embodies the west's notion of what it is to be fully human. As a result, the female is always deemed to be not-quite-human.

Irigaray's remedy to the asymmetry in western culture lies in language. Namely, she insists that women need to create their own language so they can define themselves outside of current accepted definitions. In this way, women have the capacity to shed reigning notions of substandard-ness and thus conceptually attain a fully human status in the eyes of all.

I shall then turn to Chapter 3, which shifts the focus from Luce Irigaray to Hannah Arendt. In particular I will be looking closely at Arendt's claim that each human being is irreplaceably unique, never superfluous and thus, possessive of the capacity for expanding/enriching our shared world. That is, for the sake of human happiness, we each *need* one another to express who one uniquely is. Yet, despite this ontological fact of and need for human plurality, Arendt recognises that western society counterintuitively values each human life in terms of its perceived usefulness in helping to fulfil a particular utopian ideal. And, as history has shown, utopias, if they are to work, require excessive human conformity and sacrifice. Thus, too often human beings have been treated as means to an end – fodder to the fire of prevalent western ideals.

Arendt's remedy to this current mindset wherein all human life is in service to culture, is to give new thought and regard to human action - i.e., words and deeds carried out within a public setting – so that it is better equipped to allow each one's uniqueness to emerge from the shadows and, thus, aid in dispelling notions of human superfluity and expendability.

With Irigaray's sexuate difference and Arendt's human plurality firmly in mind, I shall then proceed to Chapter 4 wherein both concepts are brought together within the one theoretical framework. When looked at together, we shall see that, far from being incompatible, the two stances illuminate, enhance and strengthen one another. Arendt's vision of a world that honours the irreplaceable uniqueness of each human being is united with Irigaray's vision of a world(s) that acknowledge sexuate difference to create an environment that freely allows for cultures of difference without the constraints of oppression.

In creating this new framework of thought, I will rely heavily on imagery as clarifying tool. That is, Arendt's world (singular) and Irigaray's worlds (at least two within a larger shared

horizon) will be brought into the one picture by way of superimposition. In this way, I hope to more clearly show how Irigaray's worlds of sexuate difference and Arendt's shared world of human uniquenesses have the capacity to fit seamlessly together. That is, they are mutually reinforcing and revitalising.

With such imagery at the fore of our thinking, we are then ready to turn to Chapter 5 which concentrates on the corresponding aspects of nature within Irigaray's thought and earth within Arendt's thought. In doing so I will show that for both thinkers, our humanness comes out of and is inextricably connected to nature/earth. Through such explorations it will become clear that for the sake of a rich and replete human experience, we must fully understand, acknowledge and respect this most fundamental aspect of our existence.

From here we move to Chapter 6 which moves our focus to the resonating concepts of Irigarayan culture and Arendtian world, and particularly how they fit within the context of the previous chapter's discussion of nature and earth. In looking at this most human aspect of our existence – our cultural, worldly lives – I emphasise the united claims of Arendt and Irigaray that we are urgently in need of a culture wherein our ontological status as sexuately different, plural beings is made visible and given space to grow.

Through Arendt and Irigaray's work, this chapter will illuminate culture as something that we create in response to our existence as specifically human beings. As such, we shall see that culture has the ability to stretch our horizons far beyond our immediate experiences as species beings. However, what will become most apparent in this chapter is that the definitive character of culture is the *meaning* it confers upon things, events and ideas that comprise our world. Namely, it is cultural meaning that most orients us in the world us as humans beings. Without an adequate culture – one proper to our ontological status as sexuately different, qualitatively plural beings – we can neither express nor experience a rich and full human existence.

Having considered earth/world and nature/culture within a proposed feminist ethic of sexuate plurality, we will then be in a position to move to the penultimate chapter - Chapter 7. In this chapter we will explore narrative – the quintessentially human practice of making sense of worldly events through the art of storytelling and the ability to listen. Along with Arendt and Irigaray, I will argue that turning an experience or an idea into a narrative is perhaps the most

powerful tool we have at our disposal for humanizing one another and ourselves by rendering visible and communicable the truths of our uniqueness and sexuate specificity which might otherwise remain in the shadows.

Chapter 2 – Luce Irigaray: Sexuate Subject / Other overview

My intention in this chapter is, firstly, to provide a basic and accessible exposition of Luce Irigaray's philosophical viewpoint and its core tenet, that western culture defines women against the accepted standard of 'Man' and as a consequence, women cannot escape the guise of 'substandard' and the unequal and oppressive treatment that accompanies such a notion. In what follows I will demonstrate the validity of Irigaray's contention that, though western ideologies apparently purport the existence of two sexes, male and female, there is actually only one sex within the cultural imaginary of the west: male. What is classed as female in historical western thought is not an independent sex but rather a deviation of the male form. Accordingly, the male embodies the west's notion of what it is to be fully human while the female, consequently, is always deemed to be not-quite-human.

Following on from this exploration of Irigaray's observations of the western the mindset, I will make clear her ethical response to this cultural asymmetry: that women need to develop their own language so they can self-define outside of current definitions of 'Man'. Only in this way can the equally intrinsic value and fully human status of women be recognised and respected and thus pave the way for a new cultural epoch devoid of oppression. It is this aspect of Irigaray's philosophy – sexuate difference – that founds the feminist ethic I am attempting to develop: an ethic of sexuate plurality.

I will set out to fulfil my intention for this chapter by looking closely at the concept of 'the Other' and how, in contemporary feminist philosophy, the foundations of this concept were initially laid by Simone de Beauvoir and, later, taken in a different direction by Irigaray. Namely, we shall see that while Beauvoir seeks to eliminate notions of 'the Other' so that equal worth is bestowed on women and men alike, Irigaray seeks to retain the idea of 'the Other'. But rather than have it sit at a hierarchical disadvantage to 'Man', Irigaray proposes that each sex are at the same time 'the other of the other'. Of equal worth but intrinsically and extrinsically different. Namely, in Irigaray's hoped for paradigm, neither sex purports to be the whole as far as representations of humanity are concerned. Rather each sex is equally understood to be *part* of the whole: different genres of the human being. In this way Irigaray's thought aids us in acknowledging the reality of our embodiment as sexuately specific beings

– at least two in gender – thus affording us the opportunity to become all that we can be as human beings.

> The question of the other has been poorly formulated in the Western tradition, for the other is always seen as the other of the same, the other of the subject itself, rather than an other/subject, irreducible to the masculine subject and sharing equivalent dignity. (Irigaray, 1995: 8)

This statement of Luce Irigaray's is, among many things, a beautifully distilled account of her entire ethical project. Hence to explore its depths, however formidable a task this may be at times, is to go a considerable distance in gaining an understanding of her overall message; namely, that we as human beings – beings of tremendous agency and affect – *must* transform our existing relations, both with each other and with non-human life, so as to promote and maintain a truly shared world in which all life is affirmed, respected and celebrated (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19). Yet, just how we as individuals approach this ultimately communal task, let alone *why* we ought to, cannot be so readily summarised. Thus, let us now return in earnest to this chapter's opening quote so that we may gently dissect its many facets and, in so doing, begin the journey towards a richer and more complete understanding of Irigarayan ethics and of humanist ethics in general.

The evolution of the Other: from Beauvoir to Irigaray

By making 'the other' central to her ethics,[2] Irigaray explicitly accepts the task set down by the founding mother of contemporary feminist thought, Simone de Beauvoir (Whitford, 1991: 11). For it is Beauvoir, by way of her mid-20th century canonical text, *The Second Sex*, who first reveals how the western concept of 'the Human', despite its claims of universality – i.e., its purported validity as a model suited to both men and women alike – in actual fact

[2] Irigaray defines ethics thusly:

> [E]thics cares about *the cultural space, the spiritual space, both contextual and interior, where the other exists as other*. Ethics creates appropriate respect for the natural or cultural habitat of the self and other. Ethics teaches us not only not to kill physically but also spiritually, either ourselves or the other. They require that law not be an *a priori* universal, except in the case of a law of silence, of attentiveness, of co-existence and communication in consideration for difference, and differences (Irigaray, 2004b: 175).

This definition of Irigaray's will become clearer throughout this chapter.

surreptitiously excludes woman from its definitional boundaries and, in so doing, labels her as something 'other' than human, something decidedly lesser (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-17). To quote Beauvoir,

> Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself….she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (Beauvoir, 2011: 6)

Thus, within this masculine perspective (which remains the dominant perspective of the west), man's humanness is guaranteed by woman's otherness. In other words, the reigning western definition of man as 'fully human' cannot be achieved without his first being contrasted against that which is designated as 'not-quite-human': woman. In this way, woman is prevented from being defined independently of man, that is, in her own right as a different though equally human individual. In conceptual terms, she is merely an imperfect derivative of man (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

And before we go any further, it is here imperative that we distinguish 'Man' in the singular from actual living men in the world and 'Woman', in the singular, from actual living women in the world. For the concepts of both man and woman as they are referred to above and as they shall be referred to again and again throughout this thesis, are just that – concepts. That is, man and woman are essentially ideas; abstract terms comprised of pared down theoretical content and, thus, not wholly referential of any living being. Consequently, it would be incorrect to interpret either Beauvoir or Irigaray's indictments of 'man' as a blanket incrimination of all men living or dead, just as it would be incorrect to interpret either philosopher's assertions regarding the oppression of 'woman' as equivalent to an unvaried victimisation of all women living or dead. Yet, this is not to claim that such concepts are wholly divorced from the actions of living men and women.

Indeed, the prevailing ideas of man and woman have profound material consequences for real-life men and women who cannot escape their respective associations with these abstract categories. Consequently, where a dominant ideology is oppressive, the material realities it aids in giving rise to (including the actual structuring of relations between and among women and men) will also inevitably be oppressive. Hence, the overwhelming ethical importance (evident in both Beauvoir and Irigaray's respective philosophies) of questioning the human being, first

at the ideological level, in order that ethical change may then eventuate at the material level (Beauvoir, 2011; Irigaray, 1995: 7-19; 1996). For truly ethical change must be carefully thought through if it is to become a significant and lasting reality.

This is not to say that random or instinctual acts are necessarily devoid of ethical intent or outcomes. Yet it is to assert that, in order to achieve the mammoth and never ending task of creating and maintaining an ethical culture, we must first *think* about what we are doing, about what we are to do, lest we increase the risk of causing unnecessary, if inadvertent, harm (Arendt, 1998: 5). That is, we must be ever mindful of our actions which, like the ripples from a stone dropped in calm waters, potentially touch countless others with whom we are somehow in relation, with whom we share the world (Irigaray, 2008).

Nor is it to say that the causal relation between the ideological concept and its real-life referent(s) is simply one-way. Wherever a material practice reflects a dominant ideology it is at the same time actively reinforcing it. Consequently, it is just as possible for a material practice to resist a dominant ideology and, in so doing, undermine or even transform it (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234). Yet in either instance, it is the logic behind the practice that is most potent – hence, the priority it is given in both Beauvoir and Irigaray's ethical projects (Beauvoir, 2011; Irigaray, 1995: 7-19; 1996).

So with those things clarified, let us now return to the western equation of man with humanness and woman with otherness and, in particular, how Beauvoir's analysis of this situation is made all the more clear when viewed from a slightly differently angle – one which factors in the subject/object dynamics at play. That is to say, for Beauvoir, man's monopolisation of 'the human subject' rests on the notion of 'woman as object': a pervasive ideology which serves to disguise woman's humanness with 'thingness', to conceal her intrinsic human worth with an approximate use-value as it is measured in a masculine economy (for example, woman's 'use' as wife, as carer, as biological reproducer of the male lineage, etc.) (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

Consequently, as the self-appointed sole recipient of full human subjectivity, Beauvoir shows how the idea of man bestows upon men almost exclusive privilege in the partaking and shaping of human culture. Thus western language, epistemology, art, techne, custom, ritual, religion, etc., are formed by elite men in correspondence with a self-image of rationality, capability and autonomy – all such qualities being definitional of the 'subject' (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

And the privilege of shaping human culture cannot be underestimated, for, to accomplish the cultural world – to create its *meaning* – is a profoundly human endeavour which reaffirms one's subjectivity (which is to say, one's humanness) while vesting one with the *freedom* to engage it: to keep it alive via its continuous and unlimited conscious development (Beauvoir, 1976; 2011: 3-17). This, put into the context of Beauvoir's existentialism wherein existence precedes essence,[3] translates as follows:

> Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing towards other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion towards an indefinitely open future. (Beauvoir, 2011: 17)

For Beauvoir then, to be human is to be a transcendent subject; a *being-for-itself* who, through her/his deliberately planned projects, breaks free from an otherwise inert and pointless existence. Thus to achieve transcendence – to enter into subjectivity – is to escape the cling of immanence which, for Beauvoir, is the ever-present threat of 'absurd vegetation' wherein one's agency – one's potential for essence – gives way to utter passivity, to the reduced existence of *being-in-itself* (Beauvoir, 1976: 129-155; 2011: 3-284).

Consequently, the place of immanence and transcendence in Beauvoir's philosophy is wholly reflective of how these terms have been positioned within the larger framework of mainstream western thought. To briefly explain: western thought, steeped in Judeo-Christian tradition, aligns transcendence with an otherworldly 'God in Heaven' and, therefore, perfection. Thus, immanence – earthly matter able to be seen, touched, heard, smelt or tasted – is held in sharp contrast to all that is deemed transcendent. Accordingly, the immanent is as maligned in the west as the transcendent is revered (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

Beauvoir does not question the western assumption that immanence and transcendence are mutually exclusive qualities, which is to say, binary opposites in terms of meaning and value. Rather, she subscribes to the idea that immanence (literally defined as 'being within or inside'

[3] One's existence is an objective given. The essence that one gives one's existence – the meaning that one gives one's life – depends upon one's actions. If one ceases to act, they forgo an essence – they are seen (at least by the existentialist) to live a meaningless and worthless life (Beauvoir, 1976).

[Mautner, 2005: 297]) is entirely at odds with the ethically esteemed concept of transcendence ('being beyond or outside' [Mautner, 2005: 297]) and, as such, presents a serious impediment to ethical action.

Thus, in keeping with this theme of western ethics, Beauvoir aligns immanence with our embodied existence, which, in this view, is tantamount to a corporeal prison in which all chief behaviours are merely automatic responses to the relentless cycle of physical needs (e.g., the need to breathe, to sleep, to eat, to stay warm, etc.). Devoid of consciousness, self-awareness, curiosity or intentionality, to be immanent is to passively exist within one's immediate physical boundaries: to dwell wholly 'within or inside' them. Immanence is thus problematic from an ethical point of view not least because the immanent being lacks moral agency; she/he/it is entirely unable to consciously act in accordance with any ethical code whatsoever. Within this logic, the human being as a *corporeal* being is always at risk of descending into a base and animal existence in which ethics are no longer relevant (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49).

Beauvoir asserts that in order to rise beyond an immanent level of existence, that is, to pass from animality into humanity, from unawareness into an alert and creative subjectivity, one must engage one's consciousness and orient it towards the future whilst spatially directing it outwardly, beyond one's given situation (which first and foremost comprises one's own embodiment) and into the external world. As an engaged consciousness one must then, at a minimum, aspire to levels beyond that of present, physical need in order to accomplish transcendence and, with it, subjectivity. In other words one must consciously and intentionally devise ends that exceed the limitations of immanence and then 'project themselves toward their ends' (Beauvoir, 1976: 17), thereby creating human culture. And as will become clearer, for Beauvoir it is ethically essential that such ends always preserve the freedom of all others – which is to say, the right of all others to enter into subjectivity – lest a culture of oppression result (Beauvoir, 1976).

To clarify this position of Beauvoir's: to write a grocery list for example – a document concerned with domesticity and, as such, the pressing needs of the body – is an act steeped in immanence. It ultimately does not take the individual beyond her/his present, physical demands, nor does it have the potential to contribute something lasting to the cultural world. Moreover, as an immanent act, it is necessarily indifferent to ethical concerns of freedom. On the other hand, to compose a poem – to exert the mind and spirit in order to express, through carefully

chosen and arranged wording what is otherwise inexpressible and, through this, to potentially stir the consciousness of others, possibly for generations to come – is a thoroughly transcendent undertaking. It allows the individual to propel her/himself beyond her/his immediate corporeal situation and into a burgeoning subjectivity while also giving rise to the possibility for enduring and ethical cultural growth (Beauvoir, 1976).

Yet, Beauvoir notes that while the humanising act of transcendence – of expanding one's existence, through her/his projects, towards an indefinitely open future – is a task for the individual alone, it is ultimately a collective achievement. For an individual's project, if it is to take her/him beyond the limits of her/his present situation, requires validation by those already centrally located in the cultural realm. In other words, one's project, for it to reach fruition, must be engaged with, in one way or another, by others in their freedom. Without such engagement, it is as if one's project never took place and one's entry into the cultural realm – into subjectivity – is disqualified *ab initio*. To illustrate, in Beauvoir's lifetime, her writings were her projects and thus her vehicle for transcendence and subjectivity. Should her writings have failed to have been read, discussed, responded to, etc. by her peers, her projects, for all intents and purposes, would have been rendered non-existent as would Beauvoir's claims to transcendence and subjectivity (Beauvoir, 1976).

Thus, to reiterate this vital aspect of Beauvoir's philosophy, it is not possible for one to assert her/his full claim to subjecthood in isolation. The presence and support of other, necessarily free and transcendent subjects is needed. This being the case, it is not enough, according to Beauvoir, for women alone, located as they are on the periphery of the cultural realm or beyond, to validate one another's projects, to affirm one another's subjectivity and, thus, to shed the label of 'other' which is imposed upon them as a group. Men, for the most part already recognised subjects, must also lend their unconditional support in this regard and accept woman, and by extension all women, into the cultural realm as an equally human subject (Beauvoir, 1976; 2011).

And it is at this juncture that the ethical core of Beauvoir's philosophy is most clearly apparent. For unlike the asymmetrical power relations of present culture wherein man gains his subjecthood via the subjugation of woman, the possibility of woman's subjecthood – of freedom – as it is envisaged by Beauvoir, explicitly does *not* come at the expense of man's freedom (Brison, 2003: 189-207)

> [T]he point is not for women simply to take power out of men's hands, since that wouldn't change anything about the world. It's a question precisely of destroying that notion of power…we must look for reciprocity, collaboration. (Beauvoir cited in Brison, 2003: 190)

Accordingly, power, as defined by Beauvoir, is intrinsically oppressive and necessarily hierarchical. It is generated only where one forcibly constrains another so that they (the oppressor) may occupy the privileged position within the hierarchy – a hierarchy that they themselves have created through their overpowering of the other, who automatically occupies the disadvantaged position. Yet, to be trapped within a hierarchy, even where one occupies the privileged position, is to be held captive. There is no freedom within this scenario for Beauvoir and thus no real space to grow and evolve as an independent, autonomous subject. Beauvoir sees true empowerment, and thus true freedom, only in situations where men and women co-exist as equally valued subjects outside of any hierarchy with equal room to expand their respective subjecthoods.

So, while the unimpeded entry of women into the cultural world, into subjectivity and, thus, into intersubjective relations with their sister and fellow subjects, requires the male cultural elite to relinquish their current hold on power, men's freedom – at least as it is defined in Beauvoirian terms as the unfettered ability to transcend, to sustain and develop subjectivity – is *never* at stake. Power does not equate to freedom for Beauvoir; it is its antithesis (Brison, 2003: 189-207).

Within Beauvoir's ethics, therefore, the realisation and preservation of one's subjectivity – one's freedom – is conditional upon the a-priori freedom of her/his peers, regardless of sex. This is what Beauvoir means when she says, 'only the freedom of the other is able to give necessity to my being' (Beauvoir cited in Kruks, 1987: 112). Or, to put it differently, my unqualified humanness, which is part and parcel of my freedom, can only be realised via its recognition by another equally free, unqualifiedly human individual (Beauvoir, 1976; Kruks, 1987: 111-112).

Consequently, humanness begets humanness on Beauvoir's account; freedom begets freedom. It is therefore possible in her perspective (and, for Beauvoir, ethically desirable) for men and

woman to equally enjoy the status of subjecthood – i.e., to equally be regarded as rational, capable, autonomous and (not least) transcendent beings – without requiring an 'other' to delineate the boundaries of such a subjecthood (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

And at this point the question is raised: If transcendence relies on an as-yet-unrealised human freedom, how did Man (and men) attain subjecthood in the first place? The short and simple answer, which shall become evident at a more complex level as this thesis progresses, is that Man's transcendence in its current western manifestation requires him to surpass Woman, thus leaving her in a fixed state of immanence. Hence it is, at best, a pseudo-transcendence whilst the subjecthood it affords is but a partial one. Consequently, we can see that in current western culture men, too, are thwarted from reaching their fullest human potential. Though they are not, of course, as limited in this respect as women (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19).

Indeed, Beauvoir reminds us that, at present, woman remains, by and large, the object to man's subject. And as long as she continues to represent the 'other' of man's cultured being, she will be, Beauvoir claims, deemed proper to the realm of nature alone. And it is at this juncture that we see a convergence between her ideas of nature and immanence (one which mirrors the overarching structure of western philosophy). For, in Beauvoir's thought, both concepts are thoroughly and equally devalued in their shared denotation of a crude and inhuman existence; i.e., an existence of pure corporeality – preconscious matter – wherein movement, where it takes place, is merely an uncalculated, reflexive response to the cyclical demands of animal and vegetal survival (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

Correspondingly (and, again, in accordance with mainstream western thought), Beauvoir's idea of culture – as that which, through human ingenuity, overrides the coarseness of nature – merges with her idea of transcendence. Namely, both ideas are imbued with the highest cultural value due to their being the very site of subjecthood, humanness and, consequently, freedom. Thus Beauvoir makes resoundingly clear that to be deemed proper to the natural realm alone is to woman's supreme dehumanisation. For while man – proper to the cultural realm – assumes the highly valued identity of the rational, capable, autonomous and transcendent human subject, woman – as the natural backdrop against which man's cultured status is foregrounded – is conceptually reduced to an instinctual, somatic, primitive and immanent life form (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

In other words, where man is a self-determining being, woman, as 'other', is determined by the rhythms of nature; ruled by her bodily functions, needs and behaviours, of which her capacity to bear young – a commonality she shares with many other species of the non-human world – ostensibly attests. Thus, as both the 'other' of man and ideologically situated in the natural realm, prevailing ideas of woman conflate, which, on the one hand, conceptually reduce her to a natural object – something that 'passively' bears and suckles its young and thus something that is at one with all other reproductive, which is to say 'natural', species, be they plant or animal (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49).

On the other hand, the naturalisation of woman deceptively transform the wilds of nature – in all its vast unruliness, volatility and might – into something conquerable, something that can be tamed and, thus, mastered by man. In other words, in a culture where the meaning of woman is conflated with the meaning of nature, man's rule over woman extends in his mind to his rule over *all* of nature. Woman, by virtue of her similarities to man, acts as a bridge between him and the utterly unfamiliar terrain of the non-human, natural world. Thus, through his grasp of woman, man imagines that he equally grasps nature in all its ungraspable entirety; he imagines that he is in control of nature, able to bend its whims to his will. In such imaginings Man maintains his supreme status (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284).

Woman is for man nature personified. She is for him the unthreatening face of the earth's deeply threatening natural forces – fire, flood, drought, cyclones, typhoons, tsunamis, avalanches, plagues, pestilence, etc. Or, as Beauvoir states, woman is for man:

> [t]he wished-for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow being who is not too closely identical. She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. (Beauvoir, 2011: 301)

Thus, by subduing man's dread of untamed and alien nature through her strangely familiar yet more primitive, more docile incarnation, woman reaffirms the western idea that man has absolute dominion over the natural world (which, on this view, clearly includes woman). In this way, the perception of man as the pinnacle of creation is made complete by way of woman's 'otherness' while, at the same time, woman as a similar but 'lesser' being fulfils

man's need for a like companion without challenging the notion of his ultimate authority (Beauvoir, 2011: 293-351).

Hence, it is clear from Beauvoir's analysis of 'woman as other' that the chief mode of relations between the sexes – ideologically and, therefore, materially – is one of unnecessary and unjust domination/subordination. Consequently, comparisons can be made between her analysis and the philosophy of early 19th century German idealist, Georg Hegel. Yet, unlike the latter's master/slave dialectic wherein the slave, by virtue of his immediate situation inside the dialectical process, is always within reach of equal footing with his master, woman, by virtue of her ineluctable femaleness – her ultimate otherness – finds herself *fused* into the weaker position and, thus, at a further remove from the possibility of a liberating dialectical engagement. In light of the above, Beauvoir alerts us to the significant additional challenges woman faces in becoming freed from the subordinate role (Beauvoir, 2011: 737-782).

Yet, work towards her freedom each woman must, asserts Beauvoir, lest she be eternally doomed to 'otherness'; to the oppression of 'immanence [with] her transcendence [being] forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness.' (Beauvoir, 2011: 17). Ultimately then, *The Second Sex* is Beauvoir's ethical appeal for the recognition of woman's right to subjecthood; for woman to be regarded, like man, as a fully rational, capable and autonomous human being and, as such, proper to the cultural realm from which she has thus far been more or less denied (Beauvoir, 2011).

Or, to word it somewhat differently, for Beauvoir, the particularities of woman's sex – specifically her reproductive capabilities – are not so significant as to justify the specious classification of woman as 'other' – a classification which, construed by men of the patriarchal elite in their own interests, holds no real truth. To quote Beauvoir,

> [Woman's otherness, her immanence, is a] role she has been made to play. It's not by nature that she is reduced to immanence, she's been reduced to it by men, who prevent her from acting, creating, transcending herself… (Beauvoir cited in Brison, 2003: 192)

Consequently, despite what Beauvoir sees as her greater physical limitations, woman is just as capable as man of 'positing [her]self as a transcendence'. It is not by virtue of her body – her

natural form – that a woman is kept in a state of immanence. Rather it is western man's prevailing idea of woman as both vegetal and animal, which is to say, not human, that prevents woman from transcending her immanent state (Beauvoir, 2011: 3-284). Yet, let us pause now to consider more deeply Beauvoir's thoughts on female embodiment lest the ambivalence within which she holds the body be overlooked.

Namely, Beauvoir eschews the female condition insofar as it steeps woman, far more acutely than man, into the realm of immanence, even though it is not responsible for holding her there indefinitely (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49). Beauvoir's various descriptions of woman's physiology are deeply reflective of her position in this regard. For one example,

> Woman is weaker than man; she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood cells, a lesser respiratory capacity; she runs less quickly, lifts less heavy weights – there is practically no sport in which she can compete with him; she cannot enter into a fight with a male… (Beauvoir, 2011: 46)

Moreover, Beauvoir's firm belief that woman's reproductive functions, more than any other of her physiological characteristics, bind her most tightly to the immanent life pervades her following statement:

> [During menstruation] is when she feels most acutely that her body is an alienated opaque thing; it is the prey of a stubborn and foreign life that makes and unmakes a crib in her every month; every month a child is prepared to be born and is aborted in the flow of the crimson tide; woman is her body as man is his, but her body is something other than her.' (Beauvoir, 2011: 42)

So, while Beauvoir takes issue with what she sees as a far more burdensome biology, she is firm that the specifics of a woman's body *in no way* negates her equal ability (to man's) to achieve transcendence (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49). Ultimately, for Beauvoir, the body, be it female, male or otherwise, is an instrument through which each person attains transcendence and, thus, subjectivity – a point which Beauvoirian analysts, Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, help explain as follows,

> Beauvoir rejects mechanistic explanations of all perceptual experiences… which leave out the perceiver. The perceiver is a subject

> and his or her body a unity, not just a collection of reflex mechanisms. The body's organs of perception, and power of consciousness, are interlocked, indivisible, inseparable. The body is subjectified; the subject embodied. (Fullbrook, 1998: 80)

Thus, there *is* evident tension in Beauvoir's work between her contempt for the 'burdensome' and 'needy' body, especially the female body, and her affirmation of the body as vital to subjective and agential existence, experience and acts of transcendence. Yet, ultimately, such tension does not mitigate Beauvoir's stance that woman's obstruction to transcendence within the current western order is based on very spurious principles indeed – principles made by and for elite men (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49). Thus it is the ethical obligation of all, Beauvoir implores throughout *The Second Sex*, to assist women on their path to transcendence, to unmitigated subjectivity. To do otherwise is nothing less than 'absolute evil' (Beauvoir, 2011: 17).

With *The Second Sex*, then, Beauvoir has bequeathed a tremendous legacy to each successive generation of feminist thinkers. For, whether or not they continue with Beauvoir's project or depart from it, in either instance Beauvoir's work, and particularly her illumination of 'woman as other', provides the platform from which all contemporary feminist thought springs (Moi, 1999: 171-196). In acknowledgement of this Irigaray makes the following statement,

> Simone de Beauvoir was indeed one of the first women in [the 20th] century to remind us of the extent of women's exploitation, and to encourage every woman who had the good fortune to come across her book to feel less isolated and more certain about not being oppressed or letting herself be taken in. (Irigaray, 2007: 1)

Implicit in this statement is the foundational situation of Beauvoir's philosophy in Irigaray's own work. Yet upon entering Irigaray's world, it soon becomes clear that 'there are important differences between [their] positions' (Irigaray, 2007: 2). For, while the exploitation of woman and the particular way in which she is othered are facts about which Beauvoir and Irigaray generally agree, how such exploitation might be resolved differs vastly from one thinker to the other (Irigaray, 2007: 1-6).

In short, while Beauvoir sees a solution to 'the woman question' via the relatively straightforward (if practically complex) transition of woman from other to subject, Irigaray asserts the ethical need for each individual to become both other *and* subject in a way that

aligns with her or his particular sex. That is, Irigaray identifies an irreducible difference between woman and man – one that precludes the possibility for a fully shared model of subjectivity. Thus, unlike Beauvoir who regards the single reigning model of the subject (i.e., the rational, capable, autonomous and transcendent being) as equally fit for women and men alike, Irigaray, by revealing the profoundly masculine outlines of this model, highlights the need for at least *two* different kinds of subjects – masculine and feminine – with each kind of subject simultaneously representing the *other* of the other and hence, promoting respect for the irreducible difference that lies between them (Irigaray, 2007: 1-6; 1996).

Yet, to summarise Irigaray's thought in this way is to merely skim its surface. Thus, it is now important to go back a step so that we may consider more deeply the complexities of Irigaray's philosophy and, in particular, her insistence that, as a matter of ethics, ideas of the 'other' must not be dissociated from humanity (as Beauvoir seeks) but, rather, radically transformed and revalued so as to properly reflect and celebrate the diversity of human existence (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19). And, as Irigaray is primarily known as a philosopher of sexuate difference, the definition of which will become clear in what follows, it is fitting to start our explorations with this core aspect of her thought.

human beings are at least two

Infusing her entire body of work is Luce Irigaray's appeal that humanity be reconceptualised within dominant western thought so that it accords with its most basic ontological condition: that of sexuate difference. For the fact that human beings are at least two – male *and* female – not just in appearance but in *kind*, has not yet sufficiently entered the western cultural imaginary despite surface appearances to the contrary. That is to say, though empirical differences between woman and man are readily noted – such as, differences in biology, physicality, behaviour, roles, etc. – this observation has not given rise to an awareness that there might be different yet equally valid modes of *being* in the world, which is to say different kinds of subjecthoods (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

Sexuate differences are presently viewed in terms of a singular way of being; a *male* way of being which, as the only conceivable way of being, automatically brands femaleness as deviant, as less, if at all, intrinsically worthy. Hence the urgency behind Irigaray's assertion that the ontological difference between woman and man – a difference which calls for the recognition

of no less than two kinds of subjectivity – has, to our continuing detriment, yet to be perceived within mainstream western culture (Irigaray, 1985; 1996; 2004a; 2008).

Thus it is an enduring circumstance within the west that the formation of each person's subjectivity is either stunted or skewed by a 'one size fits all' model of the subject – a model which ostensibly lends itself to men and women alike yet, in actuality, favours the former to the latter's expense. For, as Irigaray reveals, the western subject, despite its claims of gender-neutrality, covertly follows the contours of the male body alone. (Irigaray, 1996; 1985). Or as she posits it in Lacanian language, the Imaginary (the pre-language realm where notions of the 'ideal' human subject first take shape and subsequently develop) and the Symbolic Order it gives rise to (i.e., the realm of language where one attains individuation by becoming a speaking subject and, hence, fluent in a system of symbols which impose notions of the 'ideal' subject upon each individual) both deeply reflect the morphology of the male body (Irigaray, 1994a; 1985; Grosz, 1998). (A more detailed explanation of Lacanian theory will be presented in Chapter 4 wherein it is particularly relevant to our explorations).

the morphological body

Crucially, bodily morphology as it is theorised by Irigaray refers to a cultural phenomenon rather than a biological one. That is, morphology in this context is not so much concerned with actual bodily form as it is with the outlines of the human body as they are predominantly *imagined* to be within a particular cultural paradigm (Irigaray, 1985). As Margaret Whitford explains,

> [Irigaray makes] a connection between the morphology of the body and the morphology of different kinds of thought processes. It must not be assumed here that the body here is the empirical body; symbolism (or representation) is selective; and it is clear … that Irigaray is talking about an 'ideal morphology' in which the relationship to anatomy is metaphorical… an imaginary anatomy. (Whitford, 1991: 58-59)

Consequently, it is by way of such 'imaginary anatomy' that the human body becomes vested with certain symbolic meanings and values. That such meanings and values inevitably spill beyond the boundaries of the body to inform the surrounding culture – the world – with which it is in relation, is of the utmost significance to Irigaray (Irigaray, 2008).

For, as mentioned above, the very shape of our shared world, at least in the west, rests on morphological foundations that have thus far been reflective of a masculine ideal. That is, it is reflective of an imaginary anatomy formed solely in the male perspective and one, therefore, utterly and fantastically devoid of all feminine elements. Therefore, like a round peg in a square hole, woman cannot properly fit into a world so at odds with her own morphology (Irigaray, 1985; 1996; 2004a).

To clarify, in contrast to female morphology, the morphology of the male as it is presently constructed in the west cuts a powerful, muscular and unyielding figure, the sharp edges of which are only emphasised by corresponding inner qualities of decisiveness, determination and control. But it is the phallus of this figure, Irigaray asserts, that constitutes the defining feature of male morphology and, consequently, of the western subject cast in its mould. Namely, as the quintessential site of masculinity, the phallus is enduringly erect, penetrative but never penetrable and, as such, clearly demarcated as a singular, sword-like and authoritative 'One'; a 'One' interchangeable with 'Sameness' and which commands all else – all that is non-phallic and, as such, anomalous – to submit; to recede into a state of indistinct, culturally reviled 'otherness', a state otherwise known, for obvious reasons, as 'the feminine' (Irigaray, 1985).

In this way, the morphology of the female – as most unequivocally non-phallic – is from the outset barred from providing an alternate model of the subject and, thus, from lending its particular shape to mainstream western culture. Forcibly relegated to the realm of the other, the morphology of the female is reduced to representing only what the male morphology *is not* in terms of both meaning and value. Consequently, as the epitome of otherness, the morphology of the female has no independent existence but, rather, is perceived in western culture as merely an (albeit imperfect) inversion of a hyper-phallic male morphology (Irigaray, 1985; 2004a).

To elaborate: pliable, porous, undulant and fluid, the female morphological figure is indicative of seepage, disorder and excess. Hence, it is deemed within the dominant western perspective as a figure in need of reining in, of subjugating. Most importantly though, just as the morphology of the male is distinguished by its ever-present phallus, the morphology of the female is defined by its distinct *lack* of phallus. That is, within the dominant perspective of the west, it is regarded as a deficient and incomplete form wherein multiple lips and openings – in which the transition from outside to inside is never clearly marked – denote a plurality,

ambiguity and vulnerability [4] entirely at odds with the clearly-bounded, inviolable unity of male morphology (Irigaray, 1985; 2004a).

As the personification of female morphology, woman (and, by extension, all women) is rendered suspect within this phallocentric framework. That is, her slippery indefiniteness necessarily presents a threat to a culture founded upon clear-cut absolutes – hence, the need for her continued suppression, her permanent relegation to the realm of 'otherness'. It is through this act of domination that woman is alienated from her own morphology. That is, she is prevented from relating to her sexed body outside of the overarching phallomorphic framework and, thus, of thinking her body anew, free from masculine inscription, in ways that may give rise to a different kind of culture, a different kind of subjectivity – one proper to woman alone (Irigaray, 1985; 2004a). It is with this in mind that Irigaray makes the following statement,

> The one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning… supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps women in touch with herself. (Irigaray, 1985: 26)

Correspondingly, as the personification of male morphology, men in general (as the closest living approximation to the idea of Man) are automatically better placed in a world that is cut to their fit – albeit to greater or lesser degrees depending upon the particular male body in question. Indeed, a youthful, virile male body will, with few exceptions, be received more favourably in such a world than an aging, feeble male body (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19).

And at this juncture it is perhaps appropriate to address Alison Stone's book, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (2006), in which she claims that a significant number of arguments made to date against the notion of Irigaray as a hard-line essentialist fail to adequately recognise that her work is in fact founded on the material realities of sexuate difference. Stone states:

[4] Vulnerability here refers to woman's vulnerability to penetration, to being entered by another. On this Whitford remarks 'One might argue that men's bodies can be entered too, but no doubt Irigaray would argue that the massive cultural taboo on homosexuality is linked to men's fear of the open or penetrable body…' (Whitford, 1991: 159). Thus we are here reminded that morphological outlines are the products of *selective cultural imaginings* rather than hard and fast facts.

> …those earlier debates have inspired a now-widespread assumption that no realist form of essentialism is acceptable and that, accordingly, Irigaray can only be read as essentialist in some distinctively non-realist sense… Realist essentialism [being] the view that natural differences between the sexes exist, prior to our cultural activities. (Stone, 2006: 18-19)

While I agree that many arguments in favour of Irigaray's work, mine included, credit it with a particular brand of essentialism – very different in kind to that which characterises biological reductionist thought – I contend that many such arguments, Whitford's in particular (1995), neither downplay nor deny that *natural* sexuate difference forms the basis of Irigaray's philosophy. It is from our irreducible natural differences in sex that our cultural imaginings – our morphological worlds – *stem*. Accordingly, Irigaray's focus on morphology is central to the ethic of sexuate plurality I am trying to establish because it is only through a reinterpretation of reigning morphological notions that the asymmetry in western culture can be remedied. In establishing such an ethic, I do not deny the primary fact of biological sexuate differences and, indeed, share Stone's view that:

> …feminist essentialism can become coherent only if it seeks to revalue and transfigure *real* – and sexually different – bodies, by pursuing their cultural expression and enhancement. (Stone, 2006: 19)

That being clarified, let us return to our discussion of the morphology of western culture. As Irigaray makes clear, we dwell in a reality in which each one's humanity has as its yardstick an impossible male ideal against which all women, by virtue of their phallic 'lack', automatically fall short but all men, too, regardless of how closely they resemble the ideal, are never quite able to match (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19). As Irigaray states,

> Others were only copies of the idea of man, a potentially perfect idea, which all the more or less imperfect copies had to struggle to equal. (Irigaray, 1995: 7)

So, though we can see that the mere morphology of his sexed body guarantees to some extent each man's unimpeded claim to subjecthood while correspondingly denying same to each woman, to reiterate a previous point; the *concept* of man and the morphology which attaches

to it is not synonymous with actual living men, who in many instances fall wide of man's mark and in no instances hit it directly (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19).

Thus, the western subject, the idea of man – of the human – as it currently stands is one which is ultimately harmful to women and men alike. An ill-fit for all but the most masculine of men,[5] its preservation as a universal model of subjectivity is, Irigaray makes clear, ethically untenable, even in the event that, as Beauvoir hopes for, the 'other' is made obsolete and, as such, supposedly obstructive to neither woman nor man's subjective development. For the problem, Irigaray notes, rests with the current construction of the subject itself, and in particular the simultaneous attempt to conceptually erase the female sex from humankind so that the male may represent the whole of humanity (Irigaray, 1995: 7-19).

Accordingly we are here brought back to Irigaray's claim that at the very heart of this ethical crisis is a denial of sexuate difference. For, as has been discussed above, we do, as humans, attempt to make our world intelligible and, thus, hospitable to our being by lending it the contours of that which is most familiar to us – i.e., the contours of our bodily morphology. And though, as Whitford notes above, we are selective in what we choose to include and, therefore, exclude in our cultural imaginings of the human form, such imaginings, Irigaray insists, must spring from the fundamental fact that human bodies are, by and large, sexuately dimorphic. Hence, there is no human form as such, but only human *forms* – at least two: male and female (Irigaray, 1985; 2004a).

culture and spatiality

Consequently, if it is to provide a truly hospitable home for *all* humankind our shared world must, at a minimum, open up sufficient space for the development of a culture of the feminine; a culture which allows for another way of being to flourish and, in so doing, unequivocally affirms the full humanity, self-determination and right to *be* of each girl and woman. Indeed, only by way of such worldly transformation – in which newly defined masculine and feminine cultures [6] exist independently of, yet in harmonious relation to, each other – would woman

[5] A state which, if achieved, is fleeting in any event.

[6] For, in order to create a truly feminine culture, women must reclaim the feminine which, to date, has been subsumed by the masculine and thus defined/devalued within a wholly masculine perspective. Consequently should women successfully reclaim the feminine, the present contours of masculine culture – which currently rely on a misappropriation of the feminine – would also necessarily shift and, to some extent, be developed

cease to form the substrate on which the masculine lives, grows and obtains its nourishment.[7] That is, woman would no longer solely represent the other of the subject nor would man continue his monopoly on cultural creation and subjecthood (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

Instead, in such a culturally balanced world each woman and man would simultaneously represent both subject (feminine or masculine) *and* other. Yet, in this instance, each one's 'otherness' would be neither the site of surplus nor devaluation but rather an acknowledgement of the *limits* of each sex and the irreducible difference which lies in the space between the two; or, in other words, an affirmation by each sex that they represent but one equally worthy half of the human species. Accordingly, Irigaray here clearly diverges from Beauvoir's theory by showing how the retention and pluralisation of the 'other' (i.e., two kinds of subject = two kinds of other) within the western conception of humanity is absolutely vital to the creation of a space between the sexes in which ethical human relations may form (Irigaray, 1996).

And it is at this point that we are first made overtly aware of the inherent *topological* character of Irigaray's ethics; namely, for Irigaray, ethical relations (which is to say non-hierarchical and mutually life-affirming relations) between and among women and men require a certain kind of space (as yet non-existent) within which to form. In labelling this envisioned space the 'negative' – in that it lies between the two 'positives' of the feminine and the masculine – Irigaray confirms this space as a non-appropriable and impartial meeting place where subjects in their sexuate difference can communicate, share and create without risk of subsumption by the other (Irigaray, 1996).

> The negative in sexual difference means an acceptance of the limits of my gender and recognition of the irreducibility of the other. It cannot be overcome, but it gives a positive access – neither instinctual nor drive-related – to the other. (Irigaray, 1996: 13)

anew. Hence my reference herein to 'newly defined masculine and feminine cultures'.

[7] Irigaray's following passage, in which woman addresses man, illuminates her notion of woman as man's substrate.

> You grant me space, you grant me my space. But in so doing you have always already taken me away from my expanding place. What you intend for me is the place which is appropriate for the need you have of me. What you reveal to me is the place where you have positioned me, so that I remain available for your needs. Even if you should evict me, I have to stay there so that you can continue to be settled in your universe. (Irigaray, 1992: 47)

However, we cannot perceive the full significance of Irigarayan topology and its inherent openness without first considering how she has re-thought nature and culture, immanence and transcendence, outside of what we shall soon see as the *closed* topological frameworks of both dominant western thought and Beauvoir's philosophy.

We are each always nature and culture, immanent and transcendent

Thus far we have considered how Beauvoir breaches the boundaries of mainstream western thought by making blatant the latent position of woman as barred from her rightful access to subjecthood. We have also considered how Irigaray, in moving beyond Beauvoir's framework, shows that the potential subjecthood of woman, if it is to be at all life-enhancing, must be sexuately specific and suited to her being. Consequently, we shall now consider how Irigaray, in taking this particular post-Beauvoirian stance, reveals the need for certain material realities associated with the primary fact of sexuate difference to come to the forefront of western consciousness; i.e., firstly, the material reality that human beings are always, in part, *natural* beings and, secondly, the material reality that both female and male bodies, however different, *equally* have their origins in nature. For, as Irigaray is only too aware, these realities must be faced if there is to be any proper recognition in the west that one sex is neither more nor less natural, more nor less culturally creative, than the other (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

Key to her analysis of the west is Irigaray's understanding that the deliberate conceptual detachment of the human from nature (which, as we have seen, operates to alienate humanity from all immanent matter and existence) is counter-productive to ethical human relations, both with each other and with non-human life. For Irigaray this is so whether the separation is constructed in a way that aligns woman with nature and man with humanness and, thus, simultaneously constitutes a division of the sexes in terms of worth and meaning (as is the case in mainstream western thought) or whether woman and man are equally deemed human yet equally estranged from the natural realm (as is the case in Beauvoir's ethics). (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). For however this division is constructed, Irigaray claims, it ultimately perpetuates, to the detriment of all ethical relations, 'two dead ends in our tradition' (Irigaray, 2004b: 176), namely:

> …the nearly idolatrous over-valorization of nature in procreation, and its annihilation in a culture, where the historically male subject appropriates nature, and attempts to dominate it in order to bend its will to his, notably to his technological projects. Culture in this case is opposed to respect for nature; the dialectic between nature and culture is interrupted. (Irigaray, 2004b: 176)

Leaving aside for the moment the question of nature's over-valorization, implicit in this statement is Irigaray's contention that the well-being of all earthly life, including human life, depends upon the radical transformation of western culture so that it shifts from one that is developed in *resistance* to its natural foundations to one, rather, that is developed in *harmony* with them. For, as Irigaray makes clear, nature is indeed the life source of culture; only through the ongoing existence of nature is culture made possible (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194).

For example, the primary materials of each cultural product are necessarily obtained from nature. Even a purely vocal work of art such as a recitation or a song requires the physical presence of a natural, earthly being's vocal folds, larynx, throat, tongue, saliva, etc. (Cavarero, 2005). Moreover, where a cultural artefact has an enduring physical presence, it gains its specific form and content only via the necessarily embodied actions of human beings (Arendt, 1998). This is the case whether such actions are performed directly by human hands, or less directly via human-made tools or technology (even the most sophisticated computer software, if it is to produce anything at all, requires the physical presence of an earthly, corporeal being to, say, push a button or utter a command).

Lastly, for any cultural product to be perceived as such (or at all) by human beings, we must rely on one or more of our five bodily senses as they are given to us by nature; i.e., sight, sound, smell, taste and touch (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108).

> [O]ur senses are one of the mediators through which we can pass from a mere natural belonging to a cultured humanity, because they represent a privileged access to our communication with the world and with the other(s). (Irigaray, 2015: 102)

Thus, to reiterate Irigaray's point here, the very possibility of human culture is only granted reality through the pre-existence of the natural earthly realm in which we dwell, first and foremost, as embodied beings. Consequently, to act in opposition or resistance to the needs of

nature (and, therefore, to human need) not only potentially puts all earthly life at risk but severs human beings from an essential part of ourselves; i.e., our naturally given bodies and our connectedness to and position within an ecosystem shared with an abundance of other equally unique life-forms. Thus, ecological concerns are pivotal to Irigaray's humanist ethics (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

> [T]he first ecological gesture is to live and situate ourselves as living beings among other living beings in an environment that allows life to exist and develop. (Irigaray, 2015: 101)

Accordingly, suffusing Irigaray's thought is the moral assertion that the very givenness of existence – of life – is not, as it ought to be, received in the west with gratitude and lovingly maintained. Rather, because it ultimately eludes the controlling grasp of man, there is an overwhelming resentment and hostility directed towards such givenness. As a consequence, Irigaray notes that western culture is more oriented towards the ethical anathema of destruction and death than it is to the flourishing and letting-be of life (human or otherwise). Ironically, then, the frequent western practice of irreparably harming nature in the name of cultural (which is to say, human) advancement actually brings humankind one step closer to self-extinction. Arguably, then, where human power is wielded in this way (which it is so often under the dictates of western ideology), human sovereignty, far from being proven, is in fact undermined (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

Thus, the present-day culture of the west, as generally antagonistic towards nature, is unavoidably structured around relations of domination/subordination wherein those who stand for culture – in order to retain their status – constantly attempt to assert their dominance over nature and its designated representatives. For this reason, it is clear from Irigaray's philosophy that even if Beauvoir's vision of sexuate equality were realised and women were no longer forced to represent nature, the denigration of nature (which Beauvoir does not question) and the associated human exploitation of the natural world (which cannot but include human life) would continue unabated. Hence, Irigaray shows that the notion of power Beauvoir wishes to destroy [8] would continue to thrive in her envisaged scenario (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

[8] Refer to page 8 herein.

So while Irigaray challenges Beauvoir's notion that a conceptual separation between the human and nature can be ethically (or even logically) maintained, she certainly does not contest Beauvoir's initial claim that power relations as they are presently manifest operate to spuriously situate man as 'cultural' being over and above woman as 'natural' being. On the contrary, Irigaray unreservedly agrees with Beauvoir that the western practice of '[a]ssimilating [woman] with Nature is simply a prejudice' (Beauvoir, 2011: 277). Indeed, Irigaray emphasises this point of Beauvoir's by illuminating its morphological dimensions (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

Namely, by demonstrating how western culture is founded on a solely masculine morphology and is, thus, a realm proper to the male subject alone, Irigaray also reveals how feminine morphology is necessarily cast beyond the boundaries of culture and into its natural surrounds. Or to put it differently, the female 'other' of the male subject is, of necessity, exiled into the 'other' of culture; which is to say, nature. Consequently Irigaray, in unison with Beauvoir, asserts that woman *is* nature within the western cultural imaginary. Yet, in acknowledging the primary importance of each woman and man's natural origins – each one's earthly physical existence – Irigaray makes clear what Beauvoir cannot: namely, that woman *as* nature is not only reduced to devalued notions of her own animality (and specifically her reproductive capacities) but, too, is forced to bear man's corporeal weight[9] (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

To elaborate on this claim of Irigaray's: in taking on the *whole* of nature, woman symbolically relieves man of the perceived burden of natural, fleshly existence. In this way, the challenges that embodiment presents for human beings by virtue of bodily needs, functions, unpredictability, morbidity and, most importantly, mortality are resolved (at least for man) via the ideological separation of the corporeal from the cerebral, with the former being shifted onto 'lower' life-forms (among them, women) and the latter remaining the property of man alone. As a result, man is able to imagine himself free from the constraints of physicality and, ultimately, death (and it is arguably only by way of such denial that man is able to maintain a culture in the west that is bent on destruction). In short, then, woman's naturalness – her

[9] To clarify, this progression of Irigaray's thought is necessarily in contrast to Beauvoir, who ultimately disavows the human being's ties with nature altogether. Therefore, nowhere in her philosophy does Beauvoir fully acknowledge man's embodied, natural existence, let alone his denial of same (Beauvoir, 1976; 2011).

unqualified immanence – confirms the idea of man as a purely cultural, non-corporeal and transcendent being. Thus, woman is not only the 'object' to man's 'subject', 'other' to man's 'human'– she is also 'matter' to man's 'mind' (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

Accordingly, Irigaray expands on Beauvoir's initial claim that in current western discourse woman *as* nature – which is to say, mindless matter – is reviled as body/object: corporeal stuff available for male appropriation, manipulation and/or annihilation. And, as Irigaray notes, it is by way of this logic that woman's reproductive power is misconstrued in the west as a passive bodily function – a misperception which brands woman as a 'childbearing automaton.'[10] However, at the same time, as the sole representative of corporeality and, as such, carnality, Irigaray further notes that woman is exceedingly vulnerable to sexual objectification and, in turn, physical and sexual violation. Thus she is equally branded 'prostitute' within the western cultural imaginary (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 145-194).

Despite the derogatory connotations of being simultaneously identified as 'womb' and 'whore' (both identities being at the command of natural forces and, thus, confirming the idea of woman *as* nature), Irigaray, in continuing to expand on this area of Beauvoir's work, notes that woman (or at least a particularly distilled version of her) is also and most paradoxically excessively idolised (idealised) as holy virgin/divine mother within western culture.[11] As an otherworldly entity free from the taint of corporeality/carnality, the virgin mother is able to nurture mankind without contaminating it, to shelter mankind without subjugating it. She is in a sense a spiritualised form of nature and, as such, her non-corporeality cannot be interpreted as a form of cultural subjectivity. Woman remains nature through and through. Ultimately then, as the site of purity and source of succour, the virgin mother is appointed celestial guardian of a masculine culture from which she is barred entry and, thus, of a male genealogy which denies all maternal origins (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194).

[10] In her eschewal of nature, Beauvoir falls in line with mainstream western thought with regards to the devaluation of the childbearing body. In Beauvoir's philosophy, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood are circumstances which a woman *endures*, though never at the expense of her subjecthood (Beauvoir, 2011: 21-49).

[11] Beauvoir devotes Part Three of *The Second Sex* to the myths surrounding woman in western culture. Hence, it is specifically this section of her work, in which Beauvoir addresses the triplicate identity of woman (virgin / mother / whore) (Beauvoir, 2011: 163-284) and upon which Irigaray expands (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). See also Lucy Tatman's *Numinous Subjects* (2007).

And it is at precisely this point that we are able to make sense of Irigaray's aforementioned claim that, in addition to the west's general revilement of nature and its personification in woman, there is, at the same time, a 'nearly idolatrous over-valorization of nature in procreation' (Irigaray, 2004b: 176). Yet, this apparent about-turn of western values fails to provide woman with any cultural leverage for, as Irigaray claims, procreation is only deemed worthy insofar as it is able to perpetuate the male genealogy (a claim which is strongly supported by the dominant patronymic and patrilineal practices of western culture). And it is the continuation of the male lineage that, above all else, shores up the boundaries of the male symbolic order and, hence, of woman's confinement to the natural realm (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108; 2004b: 145-194).

> For centuries in our cultures felicity has been presented to us as, at best, genealogical. It has been said that happiness is found in the family, the genealogically male family, the family in the strict or general sense, a family in which woman remains bound to nature and is given the task of letting the natural pass over into the universal by renouncing her own desire and female identity. (Irigaray; 1996: 29)

Accordingly, the possibility of woman's subject formation is sacrificed for the good of a male symbolic order which is structured around patriarchal ideals of the male-headed family. Consequently whether such familial arrangements plunge woman into the subterranean depths of corporeal matter or elevate her above the earthly, material realm altogether, she is beyond proper reach of the cultural realm and, as a result, indefensibly blocked from her own development as a human subject, from her own *becoming* (Irigaray, 1996).

And while this clarification of woman's present situation resonates (more or less) with Beauvoir's analysis, Irigaray who, unlike Beauvoir, understands culture *through* nature, necessarily moves beyond her predecessor by recognising that man, blinkered to his natural existence, also suffers in this scenario – not merely because it facilitates his self-destructive tendencies but because of the self-estrangement that necessarily ensues when one disavows one's indissoluble ties with nature (which starts with one's own embodiment) (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002b).

> In this way, man loses the intuition of what he is, and lets himself be governed by that which distances him more and more from himself. (Irigaray, 2002b: 122)

Thus, Irigaray understands that as one wholly and firmly ensconced within the boundaries of culture and, thus, utterly divorced from the natural world, man's subjecthood can only ever be made partially complete. That is, where the idea of man blinds men to their inextricable interconnectedness with nature, their subject formation will be largely limited to its metaphysical dimensions – dimensions which are inevitably distorted through the conceptual act of man's disembodiment. That is to say the male subject is at an increased risk of solipsistic thinking and self-aggrandisement due to his centrality to a dominant philosophical framework which denies all external reality whilst allowing the phallic subject to represent the whole of human existence, rather than just an aspect of it (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194).

Compounding this problem, Irigaray shows, is the fact that man – constructed as pure transcendence (which is to say, utterly ethereal) – contains no axis or ground within himself from which to accomplish the transcendence constitutive of his very identity. That is, there is no substance *within* man's own being upon which he can gain purchase and, therefore, from which he can project himself. Consequently, man is dependent on woman in this regard. To explain, the substrate which woman provides for man equally serves as a launching pad for his transcendence. He is, therefore, not the autonomous being to which he lays claim but, rather, one who is covertly reliant on woman in every respect and, thus, one who is limited in his subject-development by the almost suffocating proximity of another being who is fundamentally and ontologically different in kind (Irigaray, 2004a; 2004b: 145-194). It is this circumstance, constraining for both woman and man, to which Irigaray refers when she asks the rhetorical questions:

> Does the male lover not impose upon the beloved woman that which he cannot see in himself? *That which keeps him from becoming what he is*, and from being able to encounter her, herself? (Irigaray, 2004a: 177) [my italics]

Thus, bonded together in oppression, there is no space between woman and man that distinguishes the ontological difference between them, let alone that provides the necessary room for the unrestricted cultivation of each one's unique sexuate identity. And where such space is wanting, there can be no passage through which one sex can communicate its difference – its truth – to the other without *imposing* it on the other. Consequently, in the absence of such a passage there is no possibility for *relation* between the sexes and, thus, no

hope for either woman or man to form a *whole* subject; one in which nature and transcendence are simultaneously present and equally revered (Irigaray, 2004a; 2004b: 145-194).

> From the beginning, sexual difference is relational for both boys and girls. Failure to take this dimension of subjectivity into consideration encourages sexual regression back to animal instinct in love and in reproduction. Its recognition is the discovery of *a new task for our culture, notably in the articulation between nature and transcendence*. (Irigaray, 2004b: 178)

For the sake of all, then, man must draw back into his body and, by so doing, allow woman to step beyond hers. That is, nature and culture, immanence and transcendence, must form a harmonious dialectic within each woman and man so that a larger double dialectic may ensue; which is to say, a humankind where each woman and man is simultaneously flesh and spirit, body and mind or, as Irigaray phrases it, a *sensible transcendental* being (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). In her illumination of this particular term, Whitford states:

> The context in which the sensible transcendental must be seen is that of love of self on the woman's side. The 'sensible' would no longer be the body of woman as it figures in the male imaginary, but a reworked phantasy in which the body component of conceptualization was reclaimed by men, freeing women for their own subjectivity. (Whitford, 1991: 155)

A reworked phantasy which, it is important to remember, is also freeing for man who, by annexing woman to his being, keeps himself 'from becoming what he is' (Irigaray, 2004a: 177).

Accordingly, in rethinking nature and culture as mutually sustaining entities, Irigaray makes clear that for the fullest, richest and most ethically viable subject formation, the natural embodied state (always sexuately specific) from which each one's subjectivity necessarily springs must be both fully acknowledged and embraced. Thus, nature takes on a significance and worth in Irigaray's thought that is absent in both Beauvoirian and mainstream western philosophy. That is, for Irigaray the present-day oppressions of the west are rooted in a culture that has veered too far from the reality of human existence. Consequently, an ethical world depends upon the development of cultures that originate from and remain in constant touch with our natural human forms (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 145-194).

From a closed to open topology

Thus, in light of the above, Irigaray's analysis of culture and nature as they are dominantly constructed is twofold. From one perspective, culture and nature are so radically distanced from one another in western thought that the space between the two constitutes a virtual abyss: a chasm which symbolically severs man from his natural embodied existence while miring woman utterly in hers. As we have seen, from this angle the very givenness of life is obscured by the notion of man as author and proprietor of all that is (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 145-194). In other words, in 'forgetting the gift that comes from the living world' (Irigaray, 1996: 122), man reconceives himself as God. [12]

So where there might have been gratitude and respect for the given aspects of our existence (including the fact of our embodiment), there is instead a sense of entitlement over the cosmos in its totality which, in turn, feeds the compulsion of man to slice open, dissect and demystify its every component (Irigaray, 2015; 2004b: 145-194).

> Even when we are in search of life, we continue bending [the natural world] to our plans and productions instead of letting it be, grow, flower. (Irigaray, 2015: 178)

Consequently, the notion of nature's *right to be* has little credence in a culture where the *raison d'etre* of nature is to serve the interests of man, whatever they may be (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194).

---

[12] And this is so despite the pervasiveness of western cultural monotheism in which the source and authority of all creation is projected onto an abstract plane via being attributed to God the Father. For the Judeo-Christian God of the west has been constructed within dominant culture as a reflection of man himself.

> [T]he relation of man to God, of God to man, often seems circular: man defines God who in turn determines man. (Irigaray, 2004a: 75)

> [Consequently] the God we know, the gods we have known for centuries, are men; they show and hide the different aspects of man. (Irigaray, 1993: 72)

So, while there is an extreme isolation of nature from culture in the western cultural imaginary, Irigaray also shows us that, from another perspective (but wholly within the same discourse), nature *swamps* culture. And though this is clearly evident in the western prioritisation of procreation and the purpose it serves in perpetuating the male genealogy, it is no less apparent in the way that present human relationships are often formed around the inner needs and drives of the self. Thus the potential for a couple in relation to aid in one another's unlimited becoming, purely by virtue of their relation, is frustrated at the level of needs (Irigaray, 2002a). As Irigaray notes,

> Western man has above all failed to recognize and has neglected that which it seems to me should characterize his species: the ability to enter into relation with the other without reducing this relation to the satisfaction of instincts, of needs. (Irigaray, 2002a: ix)

Thus from this perspective, there is no space between nature and culture and, lacking any room for outward growth, the possibility for cultivating a humanity beyond the immediate needs of instinct and 'the family' remains in a permanent state of arrest (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a).

Hence, Irigaray shows that culture and nature as they are dominantly conceived of in the west are, on the one hand, at an unbridgeable distance from one another, yet, on the other hand, squashed so tightly together that nature all but swallows up culture, thus retarding its development. Consequently, it is clear that Irigaray's understanding of the problematical construction of nature and culture within the west, as well as its material consequences, is a purely topological one. That is, it is the particular *topological* arrangements that dominate the west – i.e., the kinds of conceptual *space* that lies (or is, indeed, lacking) between nature and culture – that shapes the human realm (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a).

As a topological thinker, Irigaray reconciles this paradox of simultaneous alienation and asphyxiation through her understanding of both situations as two sides of the same coin. That is, despite the apparent incongruence of a culture that has cut nature adrift whilst remaining imprisoned wholly within it, the spatial arrangements of each situation are equally indicative of a thoroughly *closed* topology; a dense and stagnant space so rigidly bound that all available movement is confined to certain patterns. Accordingly our actions necessarily fall prey to

repetition, fated to play themselves out over and over again in a hopeless stagnation of human potential (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a).

To expand on this last point: at least from the time of Plato each successive generation of the west has been governed by a more or less unchanging 'Law of the Father'. A law wherein sexuate difference is in absolute service of the male lineage and, thus, where the 'third which arises and grows from the two…, too quickly and to its detriment, is assimilated to a child.' (Irigaray, 2004b: 28). Accordingly, where the boundless creative energy borne out of sexuate difference is restricted to familial reproduction, the resultant child is rendered a mere unit of production within an overarching cyclical process. This child, as a unit of production, is not granted sufficient agency or freedom to operate outside the Law of the Father (at least not in any intelligible fashion[13]). In other words, the child slots neatly back into the system from which she/he is produced, thus ensuring its endurance. Accordingly, the presently sealed horizon of our world remains intact – its impassibility unchallenged (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b).

Consequently, as Irigaray's topological analysis reveals, any attempt at a meaningful connection with the other within such a constrained and deterministic environment is likely to end in either subsumption or consumption (both ends being equally indicative of a forced merging of qualitatively different beings into a single homogenous entity). To explain, where human beings are so utterly compacted within a single space and, thus, where sexuate difference lacks the clarity of distance it needs in order to be perceived, it is impossible to genuinely offer something of one's world to the other (Irigaray, 1996; 2008). In Irigaray's words,

> We offer to the other that which we unconsciously reserve for ourselves: an enclosed space partly defined around a void. The place that we give to the other in fact amounts to a representation of the place that we ourselves occupy – a space apparently open in a closed world. As far as we are concerned, we cannot perceive the place in which we live, because it is cluttered with our objects, our projections, our repetitions,

[13] For, to exist outside the Law of the Father is, in a sense, to dwell outside the symbolic order of the west. Thus the intricate system of symbols which allow those dwelling within this order to understand and interpret the words and actions of others do not extend to words or actions performed beyond its boundaries. Thus to operate outside the Law of the Father is to become incomprehensible to all those who dwell within it. And this in itself constitutes a barrier to freedom and/or agency.

> our habits and tautologies. It is both enclosed and partly cluttered with our own emptiness. (Irigaray, 2008: 23-24)

Nothing significantly new or life-affirming – nothing conducive to human *becoming* – can be created from a union based on oppression such as this; a union which, through its negation of sexuate difference, seeks to replicate meanings that have long grown stale within the sealed and airless horizon of our present-day world. We urgently need to make a rent in this horizon, an opening, in order to glimpse the new horizons which lie beyond its seemingly impassable threshold; in order to let out the stultified air of our present order and *breathe*. And, in catching our breath, we may be able to sharpen our perception towards the other *as* other and, in so doing, create a shift in our topological arrangements from closed to open (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a).

Indeed, such a spatial transformation begins with our perceptions – of ourselves, one another and our world. Only through challenging our dominant western perceptions and, thus, the language to which it gives rise can worldly space unfurl in every direction and make room for the creation of new worlds (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

> It is no longer a question of moving in a space arranged by the words of only one subject, but of taking the risk to open one's own world in order to move forward to meet with another world. (Irigaray, 2008: 11)

Thus, by contesting dominant western perceptions which equate humanity, culture and mind with man whilst conflating animality, nature and body with woman, Irigaray is not merely attempting to expand the existing horizon of the subject to incorporate immanence as well as transcendence, she is attempting to create the beginning of new horizons – at least two – proper to woman and man respectively. We might even say she is also attempting to create the beginning of a third horizon – one which corresponds to the shared space within which the envisaged worlds of woman and man are independently, yet relationally, situated (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

In other words Irigaray is proposing an *open* topological arrangement where women and men have their own worlds in which to freely develop the sexuately specific contours of their particular subjecthoods. Each separate dwelling is thus a sanctuary; never wholly sealed so that each woman and man may depart her/his world in order to meet, communicate and create with

the other before returning, once again, to the place of sanctuary in which her/his sexuately specific identity is affirmed. In this way, each horizon – the feminine, the masculine and the shared space between – remains fluid and open, yet sufficiently bounded (in order that the ontological difference between woman and man remain in sight) and enduring (in order that woman and man may continue to grow and become in ways that enrich one another and their world(s)) (Irigaray, 2008; 2004b: 3-31).

> By alternating between moving and resting, going towards the other and turning back within oneself, spiritual evolution and the irradiating of the body by a more subtle energy, a duration is woven which, certainly, differs from a linear course or a perpetual repetition or tautology. (Irigaray, 2004b: 28)

Ultimately then, it is not a matter of woman entering into the closed topological order of current culture (as Beauvoir would have it) but of women developing a culture of their own[14] – a horizon corresponding to the female morphology – thus allowing space to open out and unfold in ways conducive to the ceaseless becoming of each human being and, in turn, the formation of truly ethical human relations (Irigaray, 2008; 2004b: 3-31).

[14] As discussed above, women's development of a yet-to-be female culture implies that men would, of necessity, be left to develop anew a masculine culture; one no longer founded on a feminine substrate (Irigaray, 1996).

Chapter 3 –Hannah Arendt: Plurality / World overview

My intention in this chapter is, firstly, to provide a basic and accessible exposition of Hannah Arendt's philosophical viewpoint and its core tenet, that each human being is irreplaceably unique, never superfluous and has the capacity for expanding our world, thus making it stronger, richer and more inclusive. In what follows I will demonstrate the validity of Arendt's contention that modern western society by and large values each human life in terms of its perceived usefulness in helping to fulfil a particular Utopian ideal – be it a world led by a 'master' race, a classless society, or something else again. Consequently, human beings have been and are often regarded as a means to an end – the end in question being formed in the perspective of an elite few who have the brute force at their disposal to realise their goal. There is no value placed on the qualitative difference of each human being. Each life is potentially expendable within this paradigm.

Following on from this exploration of Arendt's observations of the western mindset, I will make clear her ethical response to this cultural devaluation of human life: that the world we share in common – the human realm – is comprised of the unique perspectives and contributions of each necessarily unique human being. The more human beings are afforded the opportunity to contribute freely to the world (so long as they do so in a manner hospitable to human plurality), the better the world is able to accommodate us – to bring those on the world's periphery into its centre by expanding its centre. In such a world where human diversity is embraced at the most individual level, human oppression would give way to human thriving. It is this aspect of Arendt's philosophy – human uniqueness, or, plurality – that completes the feminist ethic I am attempting to develop: an ethic of sexuate plurality.

I will set out to fulfil my intention for this chapter by looking closely at Arendt's consideration of the human being's existence in the public realm as opposed to the private realm, noting that it is primarily in public – where human beings can act *together* and be heard and seen and bear witness on the widest scale possible – that each one's unique perspective has the greatest potential of being added to the world's fabric and thus simultaneously enriching the human realm in terms of diversity and inclusivity. In Arendt's hoped for reality, differences among human beings are embraced not feared and, consequently, each one's equal intrinsic worth and fully human status is never in question. From this basis, truly ethical human relations have the

potential to flourish as do each one of us personally as the irreplaceably unique, infinitely precious human beings that we are.

> What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. (Arendt, 1998: 52-53)

In this statement Hannah Arendt articulates what she saw to be the most pressing ethical dilemma facing human beings in her lifetime. And though the world has in many ways become unrecognisable since her death in 1975, it is likely that Arendt would evaluate the present in exactly the same, if not amplified, terms. For now more than ever before human beings exist in a state of isolation from one another whilst simultaneously forming part of a seemingly indistinguishable mass. As a consequence, where ethical human relations might have emerged there are instead notions of human superfluousness which, when acted upon (as so frequently is the case), give rise to innumerable forms of oppression – from subtle discrimination to grand scale atrocity (Arendt, 2003: 17-48; 1998: 22-78, 236-247; 1994: 307-323; 1983: 3-31; 1976: 460-479).

Indeed for Arendt, the fundamental question is always: How are we to restore a world conducive to the formation of ethical relations between each necessarily unique human being? (Arendt, 2003: 17-48; 1998: 22-78, 236-247; 1994: 307-323; 1983: 3-31; 1976: 460-479). But to be able to address this aspect of Arendt's thought we must first take the measure of her 'world' – a concept which is absolutely key to her overall ethical message and perhaps best understood (preliminarily at least) in its contrast to 'earth' (Arendt, 1998).

World and Earth

For Arendt the world is first and foremost the place where we attain our humanness. It is equally the site and product of human creation and human relation. To explain, human creation – both tangible (e.g., fabricated objects) and intangible (e.g., belief systems) – provides a home within which we can dwell *together* (i.e., in relation) as specifically *human* beings, which is to say, as beings which go beyond our natural, homo sapient existence (Arendt, 1998: 22-78). Arendt makes this point as follows,

> [The] world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the [hu]man-made world together. (Arendt, 1998: 52)

Yet, in distinguishing the world from the earth Arendt does not seek to negate our connection to the earthly realm. Rather, there is a steadfast acknowledgement of our natural origins running throughout Arendt's philosophy – one that is accompanied by an insistence that we remain ever mindful of this fact (Arendt, 1998: 1-6).

> Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky? (Arendt, 1998: 2)

In expressing her above concern, Arendt reveals her clear understanding of the earth as the only known environment hospitable to our every basic need as primarily earthly creatures. We neglect this fact at our peril. For as Arendt implies, earth alienation – i.e., where we forgo gratitude for life's givenness in favour of a self-view in which we're chained by the 'shackles of earth-bound experience' (Arendt, 1998: 265) – has its logical conclusion in a human neglect and/or mistreatment of the earth. That this has direct consequences for our humanness is certain, for without a stable earthly infrastructure, *all* earth's superstructures, be they natural or cultural, material or ethereal, find themselves on very shaky territory (a point that shall become clearer as this chapter progresses) (Arendt, 1998: 1-6, 248-325).

Quite possibly this particular thread running through Arendt's thought is partly due to the unprecedented levels of human interference with the natural environment witnessed by her in her lifetime, undertaken in either the name of capitalism (which demands that the earth's resources be turned into consumables at unsustainable rates for the financial profit of a few) or science (which demands scepticism on the part of the western scientist of all earthly appearances [15] and thus encourages the excavation, mutilation and atomisation of potentially

[15] Such mistrust of earthly objects as they are given to us harks back to the Platonic disdain for all corporeal reality as discussed in the previous chapter (Arendt, 1978: 45-65).

all earthly matter in order that the 'Truth' may be revealed) (Arendt, 1978: 45-65; 1998: 1-6, 248-325).

That these capitalist and science-fuelled endeavours have steadily and substantially increased to the growing detriment of the earth since Arendt's death[16] reinforces her view that, since the Copernican and Galilean revolutions of western knowledge, we have increasingly looked *upon* our planet *apart* from ourselves. Thus, in standing at this Archimedean point we (at least in the west) have been rather too successful in convincing ourselves that we are *not of the earth* (Arendt, 1978: 45-65; 1998: 1-6, 248-325).

> [I]nstead of observing natural phenomena as they were given to him, [man] placed nature under the conditions of his own mind, that is, under conditions won from a universal, astrophysical viewpoint, a cosmic standpoint outside nature itself. (Arendt, 1998: 265)

Consequently and contrary to all sound logic, harm done to the earth is not automatically equated with harm done to us (hence the irrationality behind its frequent moral and legal permissibility within the west). Moreover, the skewing effects of this perspective are such that even where the reality of our dependence on the earth consciously registers, 'solutions' to such dependency are often sought outside the earthly realm (thus, only adding to the contempt in which it is held) (Arendt, 1978: 45-65; 1998: 1-6, 248-325). As Arendt remarks with respect to the 1957 launching into space of the first earth-borne, man-made object,

> The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." (Arendt, 1998: 1)

---

[16] As summarised in the findings of one longitudinal environmental study,

> Since the start of the industrial revolution in the 19th century environmental pollution has grown into a global transboundary problem that affects air, water, soil and ecosystems, and is linked directly to human health and well-being. (European Environment Agency, 2015)

And far from being a viewpoint peculiar to the mid-20th century, the subtext of present-day forays into space reveal the ongoing hope of discovering a suitable planet to which the human population can be safely relocated in the event of earth's complete demise.[17]

Yet, despite her gratitude for the givenness of existence which, as a 'free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking)' (Arendt, 1998: 2-3) is forsaken at the expense of both reality and (ultimately) human life, it would be a mistake to too closely align this aspect of Arendt's thought with Irigaray, whose reverence of nature is demonstrated through her conceptual reintegration of 'the natural' within 'the (always sexually specific) human'[18] (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). For to be and remain human in Arendt's perspective requires our continued efforts to hold *at bay* the natural realm (which, of course, does not mitigate our ethical obligations towards this realm) (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; Canovan, 1995: 105-110). As Arendtian philosopher Margaret Canovan, explains,

> Arendt's view of nature owes nothing to Romanticism and a great deal to the ancient Greeks, for whom nature was an endless cycle of birth and death, growth and decay. If men are to be human, they need a world of their own to protect them against "the sublime indifference of an untouched nature, whose overwhelming elementary force…will compel them to swing relentlessly in the circle of their own biological movement" [Arendt, 1998: 137]. (Canovan, 1995: 107)

And it is at this juncture that the inherent *temporal* character of Arendt's philosophy first comes to the fore. As Canovan illuminates, it is significant that for Arendt the changing seasons of our planet together with the continual generation, decomposition and regeneration of all organic matter corresponds to cyclical time. Consequently, within this temporal zone, change always pertains to the predictable fluctuations of a never-ending, circular process. So, even though each living creature or thing has but one lifetime which progresses in a *linear* fashion from birth to death, it is the species *as a whole* that matters in this realm. Namely, where earthly

[17] For example, new findings of water on the moon have been interpreted as making it one step closer to being habitable for human life. As one influential news source states,

> Even though the glass beads contain only 0.05 percent water, the sheer amount of them presents a tantalizing opportunity for future moonwalkers… That means lunar visitors could one day extract this water rather than having to bring their own supplies. (Lang, 2017)

[18] See previous chapter herein.

life is concerned, the cyclical regeneration of the species takes precedence over the individual, linear lifespan of each creature (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; Canovan, 1995: 105-110).

Hypothetically speaking, then, without a human world we would be confined to our homo sapient status and, as such, indistinct from one another as interchangeable members of a single species. Or, put another way, we would be caught within a circle of time in which no change (outside of cyclical change), and thus no individuality, could emerge. Consequently, in the realm of the natural any given person, as homo sapient, really *is* superfluous – a thoroughly replaceable unit within an all-consuming process of species perpetuation and, thus, of no individual consequence whatsoever. And it is at this point that the ethical meaning of this chapter's opening quote starts to make sense. For Arendt's call for a world that, among other things, has the power to *separate* each person is no less than her appeal to *humanise* each person by opening up spaces between them so that each one's unrepeatable uniqueness can come into view (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; Canovan, 1995: 105-110).

Human plurality

With the above in mind, let us now add a human world to our hypothetical scenario. Let us assume that this world, unlike our present world, is as Arendt wishes for it to be, i.e., as one with the 'power to gather [people] together, to relate and to separate them' (Arendt, 1998: 53). Whilst the distinctive spatial dimensions of this hypothetical world, as opposed to the earth, draw our immediate attention (i.e., worldly space as that which lies *between* each person), it is the particular temporal mode of this world that is of the greatest significance in Arendt's philosophy. Namely, in contrast to the repetitive cycles of nature, the world's time (at least as it is conceived of in historical terms) runs in a direct and continuous line from past to present to future. Thus, it is when we enter into such a forward moving temporality that we are first able to break free from 'the circle of [our] own biological movement' and pass from being an undifferentiated member of the species Homo sapiens to an unrepeatably unique (and hence *never* superfluous) human being (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1976: 460-479; Canovan, 1995: 105-110).

Indeed, it is only via one's situation within an overarching chronological context that one is able, through word and deed (the two things that most mark us as *plural*, which is to say

qualitatively unique beings),[19] to construct a self-narrative; a *unique* human identity that begins with one's birth, ends with one's death and, hence, is significant (indeed, intelligible) only within the scope of linear time (noting that the Arendtian role of the narrative in terms of identity and its connection to words and deeds is discussed in depth in Chapter 7). In other words, it is by virtue of the continuity of time, in which past, present and future remain visibly distinct yet seamlessly connected, that one's various words and deeds, as they unfold over the course of one's life, are able to be pieced together in a meaningful way so that they form one's life story, which is to say, one's particular identity (Arendt, 1998: 175-247). It is with this in mind that Arendt claims 'the essence of who somebody is …can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story.' (Arendt, 1998: 193). In other words, one's identity is only made complete and thus fully discernable upon one's death (Arendt, 1983: 95-109).

And while we are on the matter of identity formation, it is important to note that though we each, to some extent, construct a self-narrative, this is not to imply that our surrounding others do not also contribute to the narratives pertaining to our identity. For those others, who judge our words and deeds from a perspective wholly different from our own, are able to see aspects of our identity that are and shall remain completely hidden to us (Arendt, 1983: 95-109, 1998: 175-247; Cavarero, 2006).

> …we are dependent upon others, to whom we appear in a distinctness which we ourselves are unable to perceive. (Arendt, 1998: 243)

Consequently, it is not possible for one to have complete control over the construction of her/his identity, nor is it possible for one to be an exhaustive authority on *who* she/he uniquely is. [20]

[19] The significance that word and deed has to being human in Arendt's thought shall be revisited in much further depth in the upcoming discussion of Arendtian action. But for now it is suffice to say that one's words and deeds, for Arendt, reveal above all else *who* the speaker/actor uniquely is; i.e., as different from 'anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live' (Arendt, 1998: 8).

[20] And though (to my knowledge) Arendt does not argue it, I share Lucy Tatman's view that this situation works both ways. Namely, while one cannot perceive *who* one is in their entirety, there are also aspects of one's identity disclosed to oneself not visible to others. Therefore, no single person can claim to be the ultimate authority on who another is, regardless of how well that other is known to them.

Despite the Arendtian picture we now have concerning identity formation – which, in ideal circumstances, discloses and cultivates one's unrepeatable uniqueness – the process is not quite as straightforward as simply shifting from one temporal modality to another. For even within an overarching linear timeframe the slide from plurality to obscurity, from individuality to superfluity, is an ever-present risk (Arendt, 1976: 460-479). But to understand this we need to return to Arendt's definition of the world as the realm of human artefact. For it is the durable objects created by human beings, both tangible (e.g., from roads, buildings and statues, etc. to furniture, books and table-wear, etc.) and intangible (e.g., institutions, ideologies, customs, rituals, mores, etc.), that form the backdrop of our world and provide us with a familiar landscape within which to orient ourselves. That is, they provide us with our first safeguard against obscurity. Yet this is only so where such objects endure long after their mortal creator(s) has passed (Arendt, 1998: 136-174).

> It is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from [women and] men who produced and used them… (Arendt, 1998: 137)

In other words, while the mortal lifespan is relatively fleeting, the worldly creations of mortal women and men have the ability to outlive successive generations. In this way, lasting objects become part of the world's very structure: a constant and reliable setting against which human beings – forever in motion, always in a state of transformation – can develop as individual subjects without becoming lost in the process (Arendt, 1998: 136-174).

> From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that – in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying that the same man can never enter the same stream – [women and] men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. (Arendt, 1998: 137)

Accordingly, while historical time – eternally charging forth in a straight and insistent line – stops for no woman or man, the long-lived objects of the world, in retaining a degree of permanence, give human beings a necessary touchstone of 'sameness' (Arendt, 1998: 136-174).

So, to recap thus far, to be human for Arendt is to dwell with other humans in a world of our making: a world of enduring human-crafted objects. Such objects, by virtue of their longevity,

help open up a new dimension of time – a peculiarly human dimension in which the past, present and future run along a linear continuum and, as such, make possible the recognition of each person as a unique and distinct being, which is to say, a *human* being (Arendt, 1998: 136-174).

And though this brief sketch of Arendt's work produces countless threads, each one spinning off in different direction beckoning us to explore, it is Arendt's conception of human plurality (from which all these threads stem) that stands out most clearly as the pivotal concept upon which all her others rest. For within Arendt's ethics, one's humanness is utterly conditional upon human plurality (in the qualitative sense). It is only in a plural realm – which is generally what Arendt is referring to when she speaks of 'the world' – that we, each one in her/his unrepeatable uniqueness (indeed, *because* of each one's unrepeatable uniqueness), are able to unqualifiedly confirm one another's status as human. To reiterate this important point, to be human is to be plural. Or, in Arendt's words, 'we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live' (Arendt, 1998: 8).

Crucially then, one cannot be plural – which is to say, human – in isolation either symbolically (where persons may be in close proximity but are nevertheless isolated through acts of mutual alienation) or literally (where one is physically cut off from all forms of contact with any other person) (Arendt, 1976: 460-475; 1998: 22-78). Arendt emphasises this point as follows,

> No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings. (Arendt, 1998: 22)

Thus sharing in a world with other humans whilst cultivating that world so that it allows plurality to emerge and thrive is Arendt's primary ethical concern. Consequently, her thoughts on 'the narrative' – as that which makes the world meaningful whilst creating bridges of relation between necessarily different beings – is a vital component of her understanding of plurality and one which is referred to in significant detail in Chapter 7. Yet it is enough to say for now that there is an important connection in Arendt's thought between the way we build our world through narratives (which, generally speaking, consist of such beginnings, middles

and ends which are situated within one or more grammatical tenses)[21] and the way we sense the passing of time in terms of past, present and future (Arendt, 1983: 95-109). The significance of this connection is illuminated considerably in the analysis of feminist philosopher and Arendtian scholar, Lucy Tatman, to whose work we shall now turn.

To begin: Tatman discerns two distinct uses of the term 'historical time' in Arendt's work. Firstly there is, as we have discussed, historical time as the unbroken, linear passage from past to present to future. However, there is also, as Tatman reveals, historical time as it pertains to human tellings and re-tellings of historical events (including biographies and anticipated events which have not yet occurred) which are always selective in what they choose to include or leave out. That such tellings and re-tellings are our attempts at making sense of what would otherwise confound us – i.e., our attempts at shaping events and phenomena into intelligible narratives – they, above all else, imbue our world with *human* meaning. Hence to reiterate, like other durable things of the world, narratives help build and fortify our worldly boundaries, thus protecting us from the meaninglessness desert which lies beyond (Tatman, 2011: 69-73).

Therefore, historical time as it is first defined herein can be seen as the inevitable and unbroken passage of time wherein one second follows the next and so on, independent of any human involvement; which is to say, whether or not a particular chunk of time makes the annals of history (in a form other than calendric), the fact of its continuous passing remains indisputable – thus, there can be no gaps in time within this particular temporal mode. Whereas historical time as Tatman reveals it to be otherwise used by Arendt can be seen as a distinctly human organisation of time. That is, it consists entirely of shared narratives – a certain cache of selected stories – that have been woven together to create a common 'history'. Consequently wherever there is a dearth of such intertwining narratives, a hole in the weave occurs creating a 'hiatus between a no-more and a not-yet' (Arendt, 1978: 204); a hole, that is, in which nothing makes complete (or common) sense (Tatman, 2011: 69-73).

This rent in time, then, is indicative of a situation in which human beings are no longer willing nor able to meaningfully communicate with one another. The origin of such human isolation is, as Arendt explains, an unprecedented event of cataclysmic proportions – one which sets the

[21] I note that grammatical tenses are not common to all languages but, to my knowledge, feature heavily in most western languages.

world spinning uncontrollably on its axis, rendering what was once perceptible into a blur of motion. Which is to say 'when it [the world] is violently wrenched into a movement in which there is no longer any sort of permanence' (Arendt, 1983: 11) we are stripped of our ability to 'pin down' worldly happenings in order that we might then turn them into meaningful narratives (Tatman, 2011: 69-73).

To further explain, where a world event is so catastrophic, so utterly ineffable that it does not readily fit within the existent historical narratives, it shatters those narratives or, as Arendt puts it (borrowing from Gotthold Lessing's metaphor), turns the pillars of the best-known truths into veritable rubble heaps [Arendt, 1983: 10]. As a result, we are left floundering in its wake, unable to relate to one another, as we once did, through narratives which have since lost their meaning. Thusly isolated, one's unqualified humanness, which can only be affirmed by another equally human individual, starts to fade from view along with the accompanying possibility of ethical human relations (Arendt, 1976: 460-479).

Or, to look at this situation from Tatman's Arendtian perspective, a hole in the weave of 'worldly time' (a term used by Tatman to more accurately describe this temporal mode within Arendt's philosophy) indicates a loss of meaning to the world we share in common; a crack in our worldly boundaries through which the meaninglessness beyond necessarily seeps. This in turn throws into chaos the perceptibility of each one's uniqueness (which is to say, each one's humanness) (Tatman, 2011: 69-73; Arendt, 1993: 3-15). To quote Arendt (who quotes Alexis de Tocqueville),

> Since the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity. (Tocqueville cited in Arendt, 1993: 7)

Consequently, in a world that has so turned on its head (which during Arendt's lifetime was exemplified in the west by the Holocaust and the Gulags – events with which we are still grappling), even those durable objects of the world – our faithful touchstones of sameness – that have seemingly withstood the turmoil are nevertheless powerless to protect us from the erasure of human uniqueness and, with it, the severing of human bonds. In this case the world gives way to a state of 'worldlessness'. And since this Arendtian term (or, for that matter, Arendt's conception of 'world') cannot be understood without a simultaneous understanding

of Arendt's public/private split, it is to this latter construct which we must now turn (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1983: 3-31; 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

The public and the private

Before we begin our in-depth analysis of Arendt's divide between the private and the public, it is important to clarify that in her thought the world (primarily as the space which both relates and separates each necessarily unique human being) shares deep resonances with 'the public' and 'the political'. So much so that all three terms – world/public/political – can be interpreted as largely interchangeable. Thus, for Arendt, a phenomenon only takes on 'worldliness' – i.e., it only restores existing relational spaces or creates new ones – when it occurs among a considerable number of diverse people(s), which is to say, when it occurs in public. This is necessarily to imply that the private realm, regardless of how extended one's family is or how large a circle of friends one has, is not capable of providing the sheer number of people nor the breadth of human diversity necessary for worldly acts to take place. What this means for our humanness – the most *worldly* of all worldly phenomena – shall hereunder be considered throughout our examination of the Arendtian private and public split (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

Critical to Arendt's ethics is her assertion that the sharing among plural beings of common stories, understandings and other worldly things is truly humanising only insofar as it occurs in the public or political realm (which is to say, the world). For the very act of affirming one another's human status is, first and foremost, a political act. That is, it takes place among numerous and varied people who have nothing necessarily in common with one another except for the public, shared space in which they are both situated (albeit in different positions, for to be a unique being is to occupy, symbolically speaking, a unique place in the world). Consequently, for Arendt one's humanness is not determined by degrees according to the way one's public (i.e., political) identity intersects in terms of sex/gender, race, class, age, sexuality, physical/mental ability, religion, etc. It is conditional only upon one's regular appearance in the common (which is to say, public) world (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

The private realm, by contrast, is the place to which one retreats from public and political life. Characterised by its intimacy, the private sphere is one in which domestic life and personal relationships take precedence. Consequently, relations within this sphere (be they among

friends, family or otherwise) are far more select, fewer in number and cultivated for their own sakes rather than for the sake of the world which lies beyond its threshold. Thus, to reiterate the above point, when Arendt talks about the world as that which lies between us – gathering us together, relating and separating us – she is referring to a phenomenon that by its nature cannot occur within the realm of the private. Which is to say personal relationships, by virtue of their closeness, neither permit nor require a worldly space to relate and separate those within them (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

To illustrate, lovers do not need a world in common through which to relate. Rather, in love, they relate to one another without any intermediary.[22] Indeed, the common world in which we are exposed to numerous and unknown others is in one sense antithetical to love's need of intimacy and seclusion (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243). It is in this vein that Arendt states,

> Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical forces. (Arendt, 1998: 242)

Unworldly though love may be, its existence does not necessarily indicate an absence of world or 'worldlessness'. That is, love does not automatically equate to a situation where mutual alienation (beyond the threshold of the private domain) has become so extensive –where individuals have become so isolated from one another – that a *common* world is no longer possible. Rather, in the best of circumstances, love's presence is but one aspect of a rich and full human existence – one that equally traverses both political and non-political, worldly and unworldly, terrain. Indeed, love's location outside worldly boundaries more generally testifies to the existence of the world rather than its absence (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

Yet this is not to deny that one may immerse oneself so utterly and completely in a personal relationship (which is to sequester oneself absolutely in the realm of the private) that her/his ties to the common world are decisively severed. When this occurs – that is, when an irreplaceably unique human being withdraws permanently or even semi-permanently from worldly/public/political life (for whatever reason) – her/his absence amounts to a worldly loss: a depletion in the diversity and, thus, inclusivity of publically shared space. In this instance

[22] This in itself creates an ethical dilemma which Irigaray, in particular, has written much on. See, in particular, *i love to you* (Irigaray, 1996).

worldlessness – the state of widespread mutual isolation – becomes an ever increasing possibility as does the inability to mutually affirm, let alone recognise, each one's fully human status (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243; 1976: 460-479).

So, while one's wholesale retreat into the private domain costs the world dearly, one's personal life (including one's intimate relationships), without the world to contextualise it, is also at risk of unravelling. For, as Arendt makes clear, the world as the site of humanness is also, necessarily, the site of reality. Without regular contact with the world – where manifold others, through the act of debate and consensus, ascertain and validate what is *real* – what something *means* – one can never be certain of the ground upon which they're standing. Life takes on a haze of irreality, of meaninglessness, so forceful that even the strongest personal bonds (including those remarkable bonds of companionship and compassion forged amongst the persecuted by virtue of their forced expulsion from the public realm) [23] can come undone in its sway (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

In other words, it is not the private domain but the world, where human diversity – i.e., plurality – is unmatched in its abundance, which ultimately lends authenticity to the many and varied layers of human experience (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243). On this aspect of Arendt's philosophy Canovan comments,

> Men [and women] have a common awareness of reality, not when they are all seeing and thinking in identical ways, but, on the contrary, when they are all seeing and thinking about the same objects (whether physical or spiritual objects) from their own different points of view…looking at it from his [or her] point of view, will supplement every

[23] This kind of unworldly phenomenon is particularly well illustrated in Arendt's discussions of the forced expulsion of European Jewry from public life throughout Europe's long history of pogroms:

> [Lessing] spoke of "philanthropic feelings", of a brotherly attachment to other human beings which springs from hatred of the world in which men are treated "inhumanly"…This kind of humanity actually becomes inevitable when the times become so extremely dark for certain groups of people that it is no longer up to them, their insight or choice, to withdraw from the world… [it] is the great privilege of pariah peoples. (Arendt 1983: 13)

> other [woman and] man's point of view, providing them all with a rich and concrete sense of reality… (Canovan, 1977: 82-83) [24] [25]

To consider this aspect of Arendt's thought by again returning to the example of love: though love is itself unworldly, the greatest importance underlying the act of a marriage based on love (wherein the lovers affirm to the *world* their commitment to one another) is that it makes the couple's union more *real* and in this way makes the lovers more human (so to speak). Or to word it differently, the institution of marriage arguably indicates above all else the need of a couple to have their union validated by those others, known and unknown, with whom they share the world [26] (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

And it bears mentioning at this point that the above is not to imply that marriage (or for that matter, any other kind of public avowal or officialising of a personal bond) relocates the personal to the public sphere where lack of intimacy would spell its ruin (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243; 1993: 173-196). Rather Arendt, in her following statement, warns against any kind of excessive exposure to 'the merciless glare of public realm' (Arendt, 1993: 186).

> A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense. (Arendt, 1998: 71)

[24] This approach of attempting to view happenings through the perspective of another is fundamental to Arendt's own way of comprehending the events of the mid-20th century. As Mary G. Deitz writes: 'In Arendt's view, to look at the events only from the side of the victim resulted in apologetics, "which of course is no history at all"' (Deitz, 2007: 88).

[25] This observation by Canovan of Arendt's thought is no less applicable where a narrative is fictional. For all narratives (provided they endure for a certain period of time and are shared among a significant number of people) tell us something about reality – whether they are literal accounts or symbolic. Or, to put it differently, it is the *meaning* conveyed in a narrative, regardless of its genre, that matters to the world and its human inhabitants. For a more in depth discussion on this topic, see Chapter 7.

[26] In light of this we can see that to be denied by the governing bodies of the world the right to marry is at the same time to diminish the humanness of the lovers in question. For this reason, the increasing demand to legalise same-sex marriage in Australia (and elsewhere) represents more than just a pragmatic call for the application of spousal rights to same-sex couples. Rather, it implies the universal human need to be treated in every respect as fully human – treatment which, among other things, requires having our most important and enriching personal relationships recognised and respected by the world around us.

Consequently it can be seen that in an ideal Arendtian situation we each divide our time among more or less clearly demarcated private and public realms; the former in which we nurture our personal relationships and tend to domestic concerns and the latter in which we appear in our utter uniqueness to numerous unique others (who, likewise, appear to us) and through our words and deeds, allow some of our uniqueness to enrich and expand the world in which we all share (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

For this reason action – that is, words and deeds – is the quintessential humanising act within Arendt's view. On the one hand our actions, when undertaken in the public arena, disclose our unique selves to all those who bear witness whilst inviting them to act in response and, hence, disclose their unique selves and so on. Thus it is only through action that we can perceive let alone accept our primary condition as plural beings (Arendt, 1998: 7-21, 175-243):

> Action, the only activity that goes on directly between [women and] men…corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that [women and] men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. (Arendt, 1998: 7)

On the other hand, by disclosing one's uniqueness to countless others, action potentially (though not necessarily, as will be discussed) contributes something exceptional to the world-in-common, enriching and expanding it for the benefit of all. Or, to run with a different metaphor, when one weaves their particular coloured thread into the world's existing tapestry, the world grows bigger, more varied and therefore better placed to securely house the infinite number of diverse human beings who dwell within it (Arendt, 1998: 175-243).

However, the striking of such a fine balance between the private and the public has not been so easy to achieve – neither in Arendt's lifetime nor in the present day. This is in part due to the forcible and often violent exclusion of entire groups of people from the political realm (exemplified in Arendt's lifetime by the Holocaust and today by the staggering number of people who have been displaced by war and persecution and denied refuge elsewhere in the world). In these instances, where marginalisation aims at annihilation, true worldlessness cannot but result (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 175-243).

In expanding on this phenomenon Arendt explains that wherever terror is part and parcel of public life, worldly space is diminished as is one's firm grounding in reality. This is because the personal risk is often too high in such situations to form, let alone exchange, any point of view that differs from the oppressor's doctrine. Consequently the relational, worldly spaces between each person break down and what passes for reality is reduced to a single, skewed perspective (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 175-243).

Yet it is when such terror makes its way into the private realm [27] (as is the case in totalitarian regimes) that worldly space and all it comprises (including the threshold between the public and the private) disappears completely. In this situation, where widespread public isolation is matched by an equally widespread private loneliness, we are at once, both within and outside the home, severed from each other (in terms of our ability to communicate and exchange different points of view) whilst (somewhat paradoxically) being squeezed together within a single and suffocatingly narrow perspective (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 175-243). To quote Arendt,

> [Total terror] substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual [women and] men a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions. (Arendt, 1976: 465-466)

Thus, where individual uniqueness is sacrificed for the good of 'One Man', each person is deemed a replaceable, disposable part of the whole, which is to say utterly superfluous. However, though this process of dehumanisation is often borne out of terror, it is equally, notes Arendt, the product of indifference. That is to say, even where relative peace is enjoyed, the world as a whole is in such a state of seemingly irreparable injury – with respect to human relations, the ecosystem, the growing divide between the rich and the poor, population growth, etc. – that there is a tendency towards political apathy: a voluntary turning away from political life and into the self (Arendt, 1983: 3-31; 1976: 460-479):

[27] A classic example of terror invading the private realm can be seen in the mid-20th century indoctrination of Germany's younger citizens by the Hitler Youth. Thus, even in the privacy of one's home, to voice any anti-regime sentiments was to risk being reported to the Nazi authorities by one's own children.

> [T]he world [has] become so dubious that people have ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests and personal liberty. (Arendt, 1983: 11)

Where individualisation borders on self-insulation in this way, it has the effect of transforming the public arena into a vacuum – one that is inevitably filled with the apolitical and anti-political concerns proper to the private realm. Where this kind of erasure of the boundary between the public and the private occurs, there results what Arendt refers to as 'society' or 'the social' – a phenomenon, Arendt makes clear, that is as destructive to human plurality as poverty and violence is to life itself (Arendt, 1983: 3-31; 1976: 460-479; 1998: 38-49).

> [S]ociety always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest… The phenomenon of conformism is characteristic of the last stage of this modern development. (Arendt, 1998: 39-40)

Thus, the social requires its members to behave in a more or less predictable and uniform manner which, as Arendt notes, quashes our capacity for action and, in turn, mars our ability to perceive our own let alone each other's unique qualities. The social then, in a sense replicates the temporal mode of the earth in which the element of spontaneity (necessarily present in all actions) [28] is suppressed in favour of predictability. In other words in society as in nature (not to mention during periods of terror) we are reduced to exchangeable units of a system and thus of no essential worth in and of ourselves (Arendt, 1998: 38-49).

Consequently, whether plurality is suppressed by means of terror or indifference, a dehumanised existence takes hold – one in which fluidity, spontaneity and newness give way to stagnation and petrification. In this circumstance, the furthest limits of human potential are neither imagined nor striven for, either because they cannot be (due to harmful, if not fatal, repercussions) or will not be (due to a deliberate stance of impassivity). That is to say, where immobility or apathy renders action impossible, worldly spaces can be neither created nor renewed. The world's tapestry becomes frayed and threadbare, too fragile to securely embrace

[28] For even where one's public words and deeds are rehearsed, the body of witnesses to such words and deeds, as a plural body, react in a variety of impromptu ways and, as such, are never wholly predictable. For this reason, the chain of events unleashed by an action always, at a minimum, contains a degree of spontaneity (Arendt, 1998: 175-243).

within its folds the phenomenon of human plurality (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

And at this juncture it is worth highlighting that Arendt's conception of totalitarianism is unique in that it is characterised by *movement*. Movement of the kind that annihilates everything in this path. As Canovan explains:

> …the picture of totalitarianism that she presents forms a stark contrast to the more familiar model. Metaphorically, one might say that if the dominant picture suggests the rigidity, uniformity, transparency, and immobility of a frozen lake, Arendt's theory evokes a mount torrent sweeping away everything in its path, or a hurricane levelling everything recognizably human. Instead of referring to a political system of a deliberately structured kind, "totalitarianism" in Arendt's sense means a chaotic, nonutilitarian, manically dynamic movement of destruction that assails all the features of human nature and the human world that make politics possible. (Canovan, 2007: 26)

In other words, despite the overwhelming inflexibility inherent to totalitarian ideology, regardless of where on the political spectrum it sits, Arendt understands that any attempt to paralyse human life so as to create a wholly predictable and controllable political order will only send it hurtling beyond any kind of human control and, hence, hasten its destruction.

So, if we are to return to this chapter's opening quote, we can now understand that the world's present inability to gather us together, at once relating and separating us, is an indication of worldlessness: a state of mutual alienation in which each one's uniqueness – each one's unqualified humanness – is shielded from view. Yet, though the suppression of spontaneous action is one of the conditions for worldlessness, Arendt contends that it is never wholly out of reach. That is, Arendt's orientation towards natality (in contrast to the mainstream western philosophical orientation towards mortality) reveals that the ability to rediscover our capacity for action – i.e., to rebuild a world-in-common in which each one's humanness is affirmed – is, even in the darkest of times, always a possibility (even if only a very remote one) [29] (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1983: 3-31; 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

[29] To quote Jerome Kohn on Arendtian natality:

> Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of [the human being]; politically it is identical with the human's freedom…This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every human. (Arendt, 1976: 479)

Yet, in keeping with Arendt's ethical vision, all action must be predicated on a respect for human plurality.[30] Words and deeds, where they seek to undermine human diversity, destroy rather than renew inclusive, worldly spaces (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 22-78, 175-243). For example, acts of terror committed in the name of a particular cauase, while brought about by the words and deeds of its members, seek to destroy rather than cultivate human plurality. However action, wherever it is undertaken in the spirit of plurality, though never entirely predictable and thus always at risk of backfiring, has the potential to repair those threadbare patches of the world's tapestry: to regenerate a world-in-common rich in an ever-evolving texture and diversity (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998: 175-243).

Consequently, we can see that while Arendt is undoubtedly a political thinker, she does not fit within the western political schema which places all thought along a spectrum from 'left' to 'right'. Rather, Arendt's thought challenges the very relevance of that spectrum by looking beyond political ideologies and focussing on what it actually *means* to be human in a shared temporal and spatial setting.[31] In this way, Arendt shows us that just as we have moral obligations to the earth that correspond to our creaturely existence, we have moral obligations to the world which correspond to our human existence. Being human, in other words, requires

---

> If we heed the Russian poet Akhmatova, who was not thinking of the calendar when she spoke of "the real twentieth century" are we not forced to ask ourselves: What, if anything, has ended? Hannah Arendt might counsel us to ask a somewhat different question: What, if anything, has *begun*? (Kohn, 2007: 113)

[30] My especial thanks to Dr Lucy Tatman for making explicit this implicit principle of Arendt's philosophy.

[31] When asked in an interview where on the political spectrum she stood, Arendt responded:

> I don't know. I really don't know and I've never known. And I suppose I never had any such position. You know the left think that I am conservative, and the conservatives sometimes think that I am left or I am a maverick or God knows what. And I must say I couldn't care less. I don't think that the real questions of this century will get any kind of illumination by this kind of thing. I don't belong to any group… So I cannot answer the question. (Arendt cited in Hayden, 2014: 8)

For a further discussion on the complexity of Arendt's location with respect to left-wing and right-wing political thought, see Beiner (2007) and Wellmer (2007).

our active and continued participation in the never-ending process of world renewal – through the sharing of our words and deeds but, no less, through our attentiveness to the words and deeds of necessarily unique and plural other (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1983: 3-31; 1998: 22-78, 175-243).

Chapter 4 – Sexuate Plurality

My intention in this chapter is to bring the sexuate difference which founds Irigaray's philosophy and the plurality which founds Arendt's philosophy into one theoretical framework. In doing so I will show how, far from being incompatible, the two stances illuminate, enhance and strengthen each other. Namely, in what follows we will explore how Arendt's ethical vision for a world wherein the irreplaceable uniqueness of each human being is acknowledged, respected and given room to grow is made increasingly possible when united with Irigaray's ethical vision for a world wherein sexuate difference is equally acknowledged, respected and given room to grow.

In the following explorations I will make clear that the uniqueness of each human being begins with their sexuate specificity, which in the west is buried by notions of a hyper-phallic subject model completely out of alignment with human reality. That is, I will argue that one cannot express who they uniquely are, and thus fully engage their capacity to contribute to a world hospitable to plurality, where one's subject-hood is grossly distorted by the reigning western ideal of 'Man'. In piecing together this argument I will equally show how Irigaray's ethical vision of a world wherein sexuate difference founds our self-knowledge in no way limits our development as subjects to that fact. In other words, I will demonstrate how the full and rich development of one's unique subjectivity *starts* with an honest recognition of one's sexed body. It does not end with that fact nor does it come at the expense of the myriad of other qualities, classifiable and unclassifiable, which make a particular person *that* person and no other. Consequently, it will be shown that neither biological reductionism nor the 'gender-neutral' human comprise any aspect of the ethic of sexuate plurality I am seeking to establish.

I will set out to fulfil my intention for this chapter by evoking imagery of both Arendt's world (singular) and Irigaray's worlds (at least two within a larger shared horizon). Through such visual imaginings I will show how Arendt's singular world can be superimposed upon the shared horizon of Irigaray's world whilst also existing within the multiple sexuate horizons contained within that larger space. Through the further use of imagery, it will be shown that Irigaray's worlds are rich in open spaces – living spaces which unfold from the fact of sexuate difference and allow for the infinite growth of human beings, individually, communally and

always relationally. I will continue with this visual thematic by then turning our mind's eye to the unbroken temporal quality of Arendt's world wherein past, present and future run in a continuous line against other temporal backdrops, orienting us to the here and now, filling our lives with meaning peculiar to the human experience, and thus promoting human plurality and fortifying our world-in-common.

worldly possibilities

As two thinkers of extraordinary originality it stands to reason that the imageries evoked by the ethics of Luce Irigaray and Hannah Arendt should differ markedly from one another. To explain, in Irigaray's ethical vision our present world, a singular, rigidly bounded horizon sexed solely in the masculine, makes way for two, always partially open, fluidly bounded horizons: a feminine horizon in which women may be and become *as* women free from oppression, and a masculine horizon in which men may be and become *as* men without the need for a feminine substrate. Crucially, both of these sexuate horizons are situated independently within a larger, neutral space (a third horizon perhaps); a relational, shared space in which women and men may move freely together (having temporarily departed from their respective sexuate horizons), communicating their difference to one another and, in so doing, enhancing the quality of this shared worldly space whilst reaffirming sexuate difference (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

By contrast, though the horizon (or world) remains singular in Arendt's ethical vision, it is one in which human oppression, isolation and conformism (all of which subscribe to the idea of human superfluousness) give way to a rich and ever-evolving human plurality; i.e., a worldly situation wherein each person's uniqueness, because it is valued for its own sake, is encouraged to appear, thereby potentially adding a new dimension to the world for the benefit of all. It is important to note that within this Arendtian vision the uniqueness of each person gives each one a particular perspective of the world not afforded to any other. That is, we each as unique beings see the world in a different way (sometimes subtly, sometimes radically) because we each as unique beings occupy a unique worldly location. Thus, it is through the continuous sharing and exchanging of diverse, distinct perspectives that the world is renewed and plurality affirmed. In this scenario then, the spontaneity and uniqueness of human action and interaction assures the world's fluidity, thus safeguarding it from a rigidity and stagnation utterly at odds with the constant flux of human life (Arendt, 1983: 3-31; 1976: 460-479; 1998: 7-78).

The two differently sexed worlds of Irigaray's philosophy and the single, gender neutral [32] yet abundantly plural world of Arendt's philosophy highlights the particular human dilemma concerning each thinker. For Irigaray the issue at stake is woman's urgent need to *be*; to define herself in her own terms outside of the masculine perspective and, in so doing, shed the imposed identity of 'substandard man' with which she has for too long been inscribed (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a). The uniqueness of each individual in addition to her/his sex – i.e., the ontological fact of human plurality – is not foregrounded in Irigaray's thought. This is for fear that the possibility of woman *qua* woman remain concealed and unrealised via a premature shift in focus away from the still-to-be-acknowledged fact of sexuate difference and towards the underlying fact of each one's common humanity. This move, warns Irigaray, though well intentioned, would merely obscure the visibility of woman's 'otherness' rather than reverse it (as is this move's objective), thus enabling it to continue unseen, unquestioned and unimpeded (Irigaray, 2007: 1-6).

> Women's exploitation is based on sexual difference; its solution will come only through sexual difference. Certain modern tendencies, certain feminists of our time, make strident demands for sex to be neutralized….What is important, on the other hand, is to define the values of belonging to a gender, valid for each of the two genders. It is vital that a culture of the sexual, as yet non-existent, be elaborated, with each sex being respected. (Irigaray, 2007: 4-5)

In other words Irigaray implies that plurality, in order to be truly valid, must grow out of an already established culture of sexuate difference. Woman *qua* woman must first come into being if our view of a common humanity is to genuinely include women or, to word it differently, if a world is to follow wherein each one's sexuate specificity *and* utter uniqueness is recognised and celebrated instead of feared and denied (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2007).

The above is not to locate Arendt – a philosopher of plurality – within a movement which seeks to downplay or deny sexuate difference. Though Arendt (with few exceptions) does not explicitly address the exploitation of women in her thought (Arendt, 1998: 30, 72-73), she nevertheless provides a framework that is open to an Irigarayan recognition of sexuate

[32] Though Arendt, despite her generic use of the word 'man' (common at her time of writing), does not for the most part address the question of sex or gender in her ethics, there remains an argument within feminist academia that Arendt's philosophy is surreptitiously and irretrievably masculine in its orientation (Honig, 1995; Pitkin, 1981; Rich, 1979). I do not share this view as will become evident throughout the course of this chapter.

difference. To explain, because Arendt's ethics are formed in response to situations wherein persons are for whatever reason (be it race, sex/gender, religion, class, etc.) deemed as 'subhuman' and subsequently treated as such (Arendt, 1976: 460-479), her concept of plurality potentially encompasses *all* kinds of difference, sexuate and otherwise.

In light of the above, we can see that the respective ethical visions of Arendt and Irigaray, though seemingly incongruent at first, have the potential to work in harmony together. Indeed, to bring together Irigarayan sexuate difference and Arendtian plurality within one system of thought creates the possibility for the development of a feminist ethics adequate to the increasingly complex problems of the present day in which both the male symbolic order of the west (identified by Irigaray) (Irigaray 2004a) and the widespread suppression of human uniqueness (identified by Arendt) (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1998) are arguably the two cornerstones of current world crises.

This is not to imply that the world at any previous point in human history has ever experienced relative stability or calm. Rather it is to suggest that the human crises specific to today (in particular climate change, advanced weapon technologies and the arguably divisive effects of social media) coupled with the human crises that have persisted for centuries (too numerous to detail here except to note that the act of 'othering' is central to each one) give new urgency to the need for an ethics wherein sexuate difference and human plurality can equally come to the fore – *a feminist ethics of sexuate plurality*.

For this reason, it is my aim in this thesis to bring together the fundamental tenets of Arendt's and Irigaray's respective philosophies; i.e., to introduce Irigaray's sexuately different worlds to Arendt's plural world – but to do so thoughtfully and carefully lest the philosophical stance of either thinker subsume, rather than enhance, the other. So while we have the different images of Arendt's and Irigaray's respective worlds fresh in our minds, let us now imagine how these different pictures might fit together so that we can thereafter consider what theoretical content might pertain to our reimagined world(s) of sexuate plurality.

Re-imagining our world(s) through Irigarayan and Arendtian imageries

In keeping with Irigaray's implicit point that plurality must be grounded in sexuate difference, it is apt to begin our re-imaginings with her two sexuately different worlds. As a topological

thinker, we have thus far seen that Irigaray's thoughts most noticeably centre on the space between these two independently situated worlds – the shared, relational space which she refers to as 'the negative' (a reworking of Hegel's negative, though one free from the Hegelian connotation of annihilation) [33] (Irigaray, 1996):

> Let us say that this negative created a space for potential meeting or listening within me…the negative can mean access to the other of sexual difference and thereby become happiness without being annihilating in the process. (Irigaray, 1996: 13)

Irigaray's focus on the negative – i.e., the space that exists outside (and hence between) the feminine and masculine worlds – has sometimes led her readers to conclude that she is positing a lack of space *within* each sexed world. To explain: the, at times, vociferous charges against Irigaray of 'essentialism'(Stone, 2006: 18) are tantamount to readings of her work which suppose members of the same sex – i.e., inhabitants of the same horizon/world – to be quantitatively plural replicas of a single, fixed identity. Such readings of her work, therefore, equate Irigaray's assertion of difference between woman and man to a simultaneous erasure of difference between both woman and woman and man and man. Consequently, on this view the space that among other things enables us to perceive and cultivate difference is not conceded to exist between members of the same sex, which is to say, *within* either of the two sexuate horizons (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

Following this logic the natural phenomenon of one's sexed body is not only seen to render members of the same sex as more or less indistinguishable (and thus superfluous) entities, it is also seen to rigidly determine one's life-course, so that all women (and, correspondingly, all men), by virtue of their common sex, are accorded with the same limited amount of potential (Irigaray, 1996). Unsurprisingly, this kind of interpretation of Irigaray's theory is particularly problematic for feminist thinkers, as Whitford explains:

> 'Now this critique, as I understand it, is a critique based on the fear that Irigaray is offering an ahistorical and therefore essentialist definition of female specificity and thereby positing a femininity which is not constructed by society, and which would therefore fall outside the

[33] See Maybee 2016

> realm in which one may work for change – in particular changes in the status quo or position of women in society. (Whitford, 1991: 16)

Such interpretations, however, miss a key point of Irigaray's theory: i.e., the ongoing exploitation and oppression of women is made possible precisely because women have no essence of their own *as* women – whatever essence they currently possess derives from the prevailing western idea of Man (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a). Thus critics who rail against the 'biological reductionism' of Irigaray's thought (Whitford, 1991: 9-25) are unable to see that her appeal for each sex – male and female – to have an essence of its own is no less than an appeal to *abolish* the existing western ideology which reduces woman to her reproductive capacities[34]. Or, to put it another way, whereas western notions of 'the human being' are founded upon one (male) essence, Irigaray proposes that, in keeping with the most basic reality of human existence, we conceive of *at least* two essences (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

In light of the above we can see that Irigaray is an 'essentialist' of a kind, though not one akin to a biological reductionist. Rather, Irigaray's essence is *horizon*-al (Irigaray, 1993: 57-72; 2008). As she states,

> In order to become, it is necessary to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as a *horizon*. (Irigaray, 1993: 61)

Contrary to notions wherein essence represents each one's unchanging inner core and, like an anchor, constantly reigns one in, pulling one firmly within the narrow strictures of one's (preconceived) being, Irigaray's essence, as a horizon, loosely *frames* woman and man respectively, providing both with the boundaries necessary for the secure formation of sexuate identity whilst also giving both a generous surround of space within which to freely move, grow and become as sexuately specific subjects (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

[34] Irigaray contends that the only role of value available for women in the male symbolic order is that of the (utilitarian) wife/mother.

> "Are you a virgin? "Are you married?" "Who is your husband?" "Do you have any children?" these are the questions always asked, which allow us to place a woman. She is constituted from outside in relation to a social *function*, instead of a female identity and autonomy. (Irigaray, 1993: 72)

Thus the 'essentialised' subject of Irigaray's thought is constantly unfurling from her/his centre without ever bumping up against the limits set by her/his sexuate horizon (for any horizon is by its nature unreachable).[35] Accordingly, the Irigarayan subject has tremendous scope to develop her/his subjectivity in any number of unforeseen ways without ever breaching the contours of her/his sexed morphology (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

(Picture, if you will, the distance between your physical self and the line at which the earth's surface and the sky appear to meet. That distance represents the ever-expanding stretch of space in which the Irigarayan subject forms her/his subjectivity while the line yonder – the horizon – confirms one's limits as one of at least two human genders and, as such, maintains one's integrity as a sexuately specific subject.)

Thus, essence in Irigaray's thought opens up possibilities and potentialities rather than precludes them. The Irigarayan subject is neither hemmed in by preconceived notions of woman or man, nor blinded to her/his immediate and primary experience as an embodied, sexuately dimorphic being. Instead, the Irigarayan subject is granted the autonomy to become in accordance with her/his sexed morphology: to partake in the creation a culture that is in harmony with one's always sexuately specific nature (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008; Whitford, 1991). Or, in the words of Whitford,

> [Irigaray] argues that not only do we still need woman, but that woman has not yet arrived. Essence is not a given, behind us, but a collective creation, ahead of us, a horizon. (Whitford, 1991: 138-139)

So, at this point we have before us an image of Irigaray's two differently sexed horizons which cannot now be dismissed on account of a biological reductionist (or any kind of reductionist) essentialism. On the contrary, Irigaray's topological vision suggests, without making explicit, the existence of space (and thus plurality) *between* members of the same sex; an open and airy space within the boundaries of each sexuate horizon – 'the space of bodily autonomy, of free breath, free speech and song, of performing on the stage of life' (Irigaray, 1993: 66) – wherein women, in their untold diversity, can work *collectively* (in keeping with Whitford's above quote) in redefining, in their own language and on their own terms, what it means to be a woman (such

[35] You'll never swim out to the horizon, and you'll never reach a rainbow's end. The visibility of both requires distance between object and observer. (Mauk, 2013)

opportunity also being equally afforded to men within their particular sexuate horizon) (Irigaray, 1993; 1996; 2004a; 2008).

Yet, so long as the space (plurality) within each sexuate horizon remains only a suggestion, ambiguity enshrouds the ethical intent underlying this picture, distorting and depleting it. For out of this uncertainty emerge questions whose answers cannot seemingly be reconciled with an ethics that purports inclusiveness (Whitford, 1991: 1-6) – questions such as: How do intersexed bodies that subvert the strict parameters of sexuate dimorphism fit within these two worlds? What place does one who finds the greatest source of love, energy and desire with another of the same sex have within an ethics that locates fecundity, in its most potent and life-affirming form(s), between an ideally situated woman and man – 'the double pole of attraction and support' (Irigaray, 2004a: 10)? What of those who have a deep affinity with a culture (or possible culture) in conflict with the sexed contours of their own bodies?

Consequently, there is a pressing need to make explicit the implicit space/plurality that exists within each of the sexuate horizons lest the obvious answers to such questions (i.e., intersexed bodies do not fit within this ethics; love between members of the same sex has no place of consequence within this ethics; transgender individuals are excluded from this ethics) mislead one as to the actual scope of Irigaray's ethics and, in turn, blind one to the urgent need of woman *qua* woman to *be* (let alone become). For this reason, let us now incorporate Arendt's world into our present image – thus shifting it from one of sexuate difference to one of sexuate plurality.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in ideal circumstances the world as conceived of by Arendt has the power to gather people together, both relating and separating them, just as a table relates and separates those sitting around it. Consequently, the separating/relating space between each person – worldly space – is at once a place of autonomy, wherein one is able to cultivate her/his uniqueness, and a place of relation, wherein one is able to disclose her/his unique self (via word and/or deed) to her/his surrounding others and vice versa (Arendt, 1998).

Accordingly, when each of Irigaray's two sexuate worlds is infused with Arendtian worldly space, the hitherto unclear mediational spaces between and among each woman, between and among each man, emerges from the shadows and into the light. Each woman and man's irreplaceable uniqueness – each one's humanness – is now undeniably apparent, yet in a way

that does not undermine the fundamental fact of each one's particular sexuate identity. Namely, while one's sexed body (in a model setting at least) gives rise to a specific culture/horizon shared by others of the same sex, it does not press each member of the same sex into a single, straitjacket-like mould, thus sloughing off the individuality and diversity that necessarily exists between them. Each person is at once sexuately specific *and* unique.

To further explain this point, within the framework of sexuate plurality the feminine horizon, for instance, comes into existence by way of a communicative exchange among necessarily unique women. That is, in contrast to the externally imposed political identity of 'woman' which reduces all women to greater or lesser versions of 'other' (thus eroding any space between them), woman's essence *as a horizon* can only be forged through women sharing with each other their particular experiences of womanhood – their *plural* experiences of womanhood – with no one woman's experience ever completely replicating any other's (Irigaray, 1996).

So, though the feminine horizon is founded upon a model of morphology which signifies a common link among and between all those of the female sex (i.e., each girl/woman, regardless of her empirical physicality, shares a morphology – a cultural location designated by her sexed body - characterised by multiple lips and openings, yielding flesh and sweeping curves, menstrual blood and breast milk, etc.), the feminine horizon is equally borne out of the differences that exist among women. And it is those individual traits, idiosyncrasies and life experiences that (potentially) add layer upon layer of meaning to the ever-evolving understanding of woman (Irigaray, 1996).

Or, to reframe this concept in terms of an image: The boundary of the feminine horizon represents the female morphology, thus indicating a fundamental and significant unifying experience between and among all those of the female sex. However, the space within this boundary retains its vitality, its ever-changing life and growth, only by virtue of the infinite plurality that exists between and among all those of the female sex. The substance of feminine culture is thus formed within the relational spaces that open up between necessarily unique women in communication. And as such spaces open and close, shift and change, the horizon-al boundary, without losing its integrity, also alters to accommodate these new arrangements of space (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

Thus, what it means to be a woman – to dwell within/through the sexed contours of the female body – can never be defined by just one woman. The meaning of woman attains validity only when it represents the views of many and diverse women, of all ages, races, ethnicities, sexuate identities, cultures, abilities, classes, religions, etc. Consequently, within the morphological contours of the female body the scope for feminine subject formation abounds. Each woman is able to cultivate her distinctiveness (her *who*-ness) without denying her immediate and primary experience as an embodied, sexuately specific human being (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

(Picture yourself within an open space. You are not alone but in the company of others common to your sex; others who, like you, relate to the world, first and foremost, as embodied beings of a particular *sex – i.e., your sex, whether it be female, male or other. Thus, the potential culture that derives from the natural contours of your sexed body is, at its most fundamental level, one and the same as the potential culture that derives from the bodies of all those who share your sex. In letting this culture develop (through the exchange of necessarily unique points of view by way of words and deeds), you and your like-others create for yourselves an envelope – a common horizon; one that affirms your shared experience as embodied beings of a particular sex, yet one that is forever expanding, forever opening up new spaces between you and your like-others through which you can each communicate your differences, your unique selves, thus creating a shared culture replete in richness, variety and inclusivity.)*

In uniting the worldly imageries of Irigaray and Arendt as we have done above, we are at once acknowledging that the culture we build for ourselves is, above all else, shaped via our immediate experience of the world as embodied beings and that the sexed contours of the natural body (bodies) inevitably spill over into the cultural world, giving it its particular shape and meaning. Thus each sex, in order to be at home in the world(s), in order to have access to its full potential, must be free to create a culture in harmony with its particular morphology, which is to say that each sex must be free to create a world within which to dwell on its *own* terms and no one else's (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

Equally, by bringing together the worlds of Irigaray and Arendt we are no less acknowledging that each person, within the immediate boundary of their sexuate horizon and the greater boundary of their human horizon, is an utterly unique individual – a *who* before a *what* (Arendt, 1998; Cavarero, 2006). That is, to put it in Arendt's words,

> We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live. (Arendt, 1998: 8)

Namely, plurality is one of the first ontological conditions of being human. Your humanness and mine depend upon our free disclosure to one another of *who* we uniquely and incomparably are (Arendt, 1998; Cavarero, 2006).

Ultimately then, by uniting Irigarayan and Arendtian worldly imageries, it becomes a little clearer that a generic sexuate identity, when it is underpinned by an ethics of sexuate difference, does not reduce one to type but provides a solid foundation from which one can inexhaustibly cultivate both one's own uniqueness and one's relationality with necessarily unique others (Arendt, 1998). Likewise, our re-imagined worlds lend clarity to the fact that *who* one uniquely is is never neuter. One's sex infuses one's being and cannot be bracketed off as simply one aspect of the self (Irigaray, 2004a). Hence, it is with this new understanding that we must now return to the questions raised above concerning intersexuality, homosexuality and transgenderism.

As previously discussed, at first glance Irigaray's two envisaged worlds of sexuate difference seemingly exclude all those who are situated outside a sexuately dimorphic and/or heteronormative existence. Yet when the inherent plurality within these dual horizons is made explicit via the incorporation of certain tenets of Arendt's philosophy, *who* one uniquely is, which necessarily includes one's sexuate specificity (be it female, male or other), one's sexual preference (be it towards members of the same sex, different sex, all sexes, etc.) and one's embodied gender practices (whether they align with heteronormative conventions or flout them completely) is granted unconditional credence. For the ontological phenomenon of plurality requires no less. To deny worldly space – the space of appearance and development – to any facet of one's being is the very antithesis of plurality.

In this way Arendtian plurality reveals the feminine and masculine horizons of Irigaray's ethics as the *starting* points for true human becoming. Thus one would be mistaken to view the realisation of a culture of sexuate difference as the definitive end to cultural development/human evolvement. To explain, by first acknowledging woman *qua* woman, genuine difference is introduced into the realm of human existence. Our conception of

humankind (and, thus, our experiences as human beings) shifts from one of 'sameness', in which all persons are greater or lesser approximations of a single masculine ideal, to one of difference, in which humankind is reconceived as being comprised of at least two genres – female and male (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

From this new foundation which acknowledges genuine and, as such, non-hierarchical difference among human beings at the most fundamental level, spaces are able to open up for the articulation, development and disclosure of all other kinds of difference (including but by no means limited to the often forcibly silenced lived experiences of those who identify as LGBTIQ). Needless to say, such spaces, in keeping with the foundation from which they spring, are equally devoid of hierarchical divisions wherein difference renders one either more or less human. Thus, the topology inherent to the world(s) of sexuate plurality is akin to the topology of Irigaray's ethics – i.e., completely open, forever unfurling in anticipation and embracement of each one as an irreducibly unique human being (Irigaray, 1996; 2008).

Yet, whether this fluid spatial setting ultimately leads to dramatic dimensional shifts of each sexuate horizon to incorporate as yet unacknowledged modes of human being or whether utterly new horizons are stirred into existence alongside, within or in place of the two sexuate horizons one can only imagine. For to reiterate: the masculine and feminine horizons within our envisaged ethics of sexuate plurality are, as in Irigaray's ethics of sexuate difference, the *starting points* of an open-ended and, thus, non-determinable ethical culture – starting points relevant to arguably the most pressing concern of the current age (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008):

> Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our "salvation" if we thought it through. (Irigaray, 2004a: 7)

Thus, what matters from the viewpoint of this ethics is not the precise shape our world(s) will eventually take (which, at odds with this ethics, supposes an inevitable halt to the flux and fluidity of human existence – a cultural endpoint so to speak), but only that its topology remain open while its temporal mode(s) remain unbroken and free-flowing. And while this seems the appropriate place to begin a deeper exploration of the space-time relevant to an ethics of sexuate plurality, there is still one more question that needs to be properly addressed before we

move onto matters topological and temporal. Namely: Why must the introduction of genuine difference into human culture begin with the recognition of sexuate difference as opposed to, say, racial difference or class difference?

Indeed, what is it about sexuate difference per se that renders it fundamental to the creation of a culture characterised by unconditional inclusivity and relationality? To answer, though there are many differences aside from sexuate difference that in the present culture of the west hierarchically divide human beings and pit them against one another, it is only through the initial recognition and respect of sexuate difference that we can find new, non-hierarchical ways of relating to each other and to non-human existence that both honour and foster the myriad of differences that each one represents (Irigaray, 2007).

The above is not to imply that sexuate difference is ranked over and above other kinds of difference in terms of significance. Rather, it is to assert that the many and varied bases for dehumanisation in the west have all resulted from a preceding denial of sexuate difference. Hence, any attempts to ethically transform culture via the prioritisation of non-sexuate difference shall only divert our attention from the core issue at stake and thus perpetuate longstanding cultural biases in which only a precious few are accorded a fully human status [36] (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2007). As Irigaray notes,

> People never cease to divide themselves into secondary but deadly rivalries without realising that their primary and insurmountable division is into two genders. (Irigaray, 2007: 5)

Supporting the claim that positive cultural change must begin with the recognition of sexuate difference is the fact that we build our culture (ethical or otherwise) in ways that primarily reflect the morphological lines of the sexed body (as opposed to, say, the raced body or the aged body) - the *phallic* skyscraper, the *womblike* dungeon – hence indicating the centrality of sexedness to our understandings of what it means to be human (Irigaray, 1996; 2007).[37]

[36] And the lack of total success within the long history of Marxist revolutions (which focus on class divisions), civil rights movements (which focus on race divisions) and certain feminist movements (which strive for equality between men and women) arguably attests to the need for a preceding ethical movement that focuses on the ontological fact of sexuate difference, thereby allowing the way to be paved for the subsequent eradication of specific kinds of oppression (Irigaray, 1996; 2007).

[37] See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the relation between bodily morphology and culture.

Consequently, whether one is 'othered' in terms of their race, class, age, sexuality, etc., the sexed body (or, rather, dominant cultural imaginings of it) is utterly central to the process.[38]

To further explain, however a person differs from the reigning model of 'the human being', such difference is automatically associated with the morphology of the female (as it has to date been defined within the masculine perspective) which, in turn, accordingly lowers the 'value' of the person as a whole. Thus, within dominant western culture all non-white persons, regardless of sex, are feminized in the same way, as are all those who are situated at the farthest ends of the age-spectrum, as are all those who subscribe to religions not of Judeo-Christian origin, etc. The wholesale feminization of all culturally 'inferior' traits thus reinforces the claim herein that sexuate difference is the primary difference through which all other human differences are interpreted and subsequently valued. Therefore, in a culture where sexuate difference is denied, the interpretive lens it provides is necessarily faulty (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

Adding much clarity and nuance to this claim are Irigaray's writings on our 'first other', the mother. Namely, Irigaray reveals that the ongoing denial of sexuate difference in western culture – a denial which has led to the general vilification of *all* kinds of difference – can be traced back to the covering over of our maternal origins. To elaborate, this disavowal of the mother as the very source of life underpins the present symbolic order of the west and has its roots in the masculine fear of woman's reproductive power (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114). Namely, in order to quell this fear man allows the fact of his imminent death to overshadow his maternal origins and, with them, the feminine power with which they are suffused. As Cavarero explains,

> Men are excluded from the exclusively female experience of generating life (excluded from the secret). Since death takes away life, they find in death a place they regard as more powerful than life... [Consequently] man does not look at birth, at his being born of mother, which happens at the outset. He looks at death, and every time he prefigures his own death. (Cavarero, 1995: 68)

[38] The centrality of sexed morphology to the othering process in no way precludes the effects of race, class, age, religion, sexuality, etc. on the perception of one's sex. Which is to say, all my claims herein are made in light of the phenomenon of intersectionality (the way one's various identity categories mutually intersect to give rise to a complex and unique identity).

In other words, within western logic death casts an almost impenetrable pall over the event of natality and, hence, over the mother's awesome power to both 'generate and not generate' (Cavarero, 1995: 59).

> This is an absolute power that presides over the place from which humans come into the world and over nothingness, as birth-no-more, the endpoint of the maternal continuum which also marks symbolically the end of the world. (Cavarero, 1995: 59)

Consequently, the repression/suppression of woman's reproductive power within the western Cultural Imaginary ostensibly relegates her to a passive role where the generation of life is concerned. Reconceived as utterly devoid of power, woman is merely vessel/womb/conveyor of the male lineage (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114; 1996; 1995).

Thus, the current symbolic order of the west sits atop of the unmarked grave of the primal mother. To exhume her – i.e., to acknowledge our maternal origins – would require extensive excavation of the ground upon which present-day western culture is built, thus toppling it into chaos and, in turn, rending asunder those lines which have to date divided humankind into either 'same' or 'other of the same' (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114; 2004a; 1996; 1995).

Or, to explain this observation in slightly different terms, it is at the site of originary matricide where the merging of all humanity into a 'one' first took place and from which the masculine culture of 'sameness' was able to flourish (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114).

> An unresolved link with the mother, an originary lack of recognition of her existence, irreducible to our own, leave us submerged in an undifferentiated collective 'one' in which each is confused with the other but without a possible meeting between us – merged together, we are also separated by a fundamental ignorance in relation with the other. (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114)

Until the debt owed to our maternal origins is acknowledged, our culture will continue to breed ignorance wherever the difference of the other is concerned, whether that difference pertains to sex, race, sexuality, age, physical ability, religion, etc. Moreover, as long as the mother remains buried, current masculine values of domination and appropriation shall aid in suppressing all kinds of difference through oppression and violence. Thus, it is only through

an initial recognition of sexuate difference – our first and primary difference – and its earliest representative in the mother that humanity can begin to liberate itself from the many and varied hierarchies of human relations in which we are all only either 'more or less' (Irigaray, 1995: 19).

And at this juncture we are able to turn our thoughts, once again, to matters of space and time. For to make possible a sexuately plural world(s) in which the intrinsic and immeasurable worth of each human being shatters all illusions of 'more or less', we need to combine an open and fluid topology with a shared and unbroken temporality. That is, we need to bring together Irigarayan space and Arendtian time so that each person, as a sexuately specific and utterly unique subject, may partake, without limit, in the infinite process of human becoming.

The space-time of sexuate plurality

Though a topological philosopher there are certainly strong temporal elements within Irigaray's work worth paying close attention to. Likewise, there are sharp insights into spatiality within Arendt's philosophy that should not be passed over in the effort to grapple with her thoughts on time. Indeed to address the less obvious aspects of space-time within the work of each thinker is to enhance our understanding of the kind of space-time relevant to a world(s) of sexuate plurality. Thus, let us commence this phase of our explorations by first considering Irigaray's assessment of the current temporal mode dominating the west and how it might otherwise be. Then let us turn our hands to the intricate task of interweaving Irigaray's ideas of time and space with those of Arendt's so that a way might be opened for a new and sexuately plural concept of space-time to emerge.

To start: Time in Irigaray's thought is inescapably and inextricably bound up with space (as is necessarily the case with any philosophy on temporality). Consequently, her understanding of our present-day western world as a closed, one-dimensional and solely masculine horizon brings to mind a deficiency of the space necessary for each human being's uniqueness to unfold in harmony with her/his morphological surroundings. Thus, the current western world is, for Irigaray, one in which human beings are, for lack of space, forcibly pressed into one another, restricting one another's movements and breathing one another's stale air. Accordingly human growth and becoming – which relies on abundant space and fresh air – is limited at best,

impossible at worst (Irigaray, 1996; 2008). And in order to better comprehend this picture it is at this point worth revisiting Irigaray's Lacanian analysis (introduced in Chapter 2).

the Irigarayan Lacanian perspective

Namely, within a psychoanalytical context, Irigaray, taking her cue from Lacan, separates the world into two realms (or two successive psychological stages); the pre-language, maternal realm of the imaginary (in which the infant is still somewhat symbiotically attached to its mother and in which the most elementary bodily needs and functions make up the majority of experience) and the paternal realm of the symbolic order (the site of intelligible language wherein one enters as a separately identifiable subject, thereby severing the symbiotic attachment with the mother and leaving behind the 'messiness' of corporeality – conceptually, if not actually – in the realm of the imaginary) (Irigaray, 1985).

Yet the imaginary does not cease to exist for one after they have entered the symbolic order. Rather it is merely repressed – a necessary step lest the chaotic incomprehensibility of the imaginary disrupt the ordered representations of the symbolic. Accordingly one might visualise the symbolic order as the contained sphere of unambiguous meaning governed by the 'law of the Father' whereas the imaginary, awash in amniotic fluid, is the inexplicable pulsating gush which surrounds the (almost but not quite) hermetically sealed symbolic order, forever threatening to permeate its rigid boundaries and plunge all paternal structure, order and meaning into a feminine abyss (Irigaray, 1994: 53-67, 1995; 1996).

Hence, we can see that the symbolic order is constructed for the sake of the individuated 'I', designed to safeguard him (more so than *her*, as will be made clearer below) from being swallowed whole by the mother's moist and cavernous eternal embrace.

> And so he [the Father] is protected from that indecent contact…woman. From any possible assimilation to that undefined flow that dampens, wets, floods, conducts, electrifies the gap, makes it glow in its blazing embrace. (Irigaray, 1994: 64)

Thus a properly developed psyche, as defined by western culture, is one which culminates in a complete desertion/rejection of the feminine, the maternal. For this reason, the individuated 'I' – i.e., the human subject – is accessible in its entirety only to the male. To elaborate, the

Father's debarment of the feminine/maternal from the realm of meaning/language (which is another way of describing the figurative murder of the primal mother) is carried out in order to free the male child from the corporeality in which his mother has enshrouded him (associated as it is with the most fearsome death and decay),[39] thereby allowing him to ascend (transcend) to the realm of language (the symbolic order) where the law of the Father reigns supreme (Irigaray, 1995; 2007).

The infant daughter, on the other hand, by virtue of her perceived maternal destiny (a perception made in light of her female sex), is never granted full exit from the maternal realm (Irigaray, 1995: 34-52). Woman is thus perceived as straddling the dangerous divide between order and chaos, reason and madness. And so long as this is the case, full subjecthood – an unqualified human status – shall continue to elude her (Irigaray, 1995; 2007).

Consequently, within Irigaray's Lacanian framework it becomes clear that her assessment of the western world as a single, one-dimensional and masculine horizon corresponds to a view of the present-day symbolic order as one which, by virtue of its continued r/ejection of the feminine (as well as all those 'loathsome' aspects of human existence with which the feminine has been associated) has allowed its closed boundaries to become ossified and thus unable to yield or expand in order to free up entangled limbs and inflate the lungs with air – in order, that is, to accommodate both sexuate difference and plurality (Irigaray, 1995; 2004a).

Thus Irigaray reveals that pressed together within a hostile horizon (hostile to varying degrees for various peoples), all our available movements are confined to certain patterns. Hence our actions necessarily fall prey to repetition. Human *time*, therefore, is trapped in a rigid and airtight environment, unable to move forwards or extend outwards, fated to play itself out over and over again in a hopeless stagnation of human potential (Irigaray, 1995; 1996).

In concrete terms, such repetition is evident in the western prioritisation of perpetuating the male lineage. Namely this practice, in which love, fecundity and human becoming are more or

[39] As we have seen, death is lauded within the dominant masculine perspective of the west. Yet it is also gravely feared. Perhaps the best way to reconcile these seemingly paradoxical stands is to surmise that one's fear of death – i.e., one's consciousness of one's mortal limits – leads the masculine subject on a vain quest to 'master' his death, hence (a) the priority death is given over life within mainstream western thought and (b) man's simultaneous 'disowning' of his body (as that which will expire) and his total appropriation of the mind (as that which is potentially eternal).

less displaced in favour of patriarchal duty, vests in the father of the male child a longed-for sense of immortality (which harks back to his primal fear of death) by virtue of the child's obligation to continue his lineage (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a). The effects of the patriarchal family's entwinement with the west's temporal mode is expanded on by Irigaray thusly,

> A beloved [one's child] who is an *end* is substituted for love between men and women. A beloved who is a *will*, even a *duty*, and a *means* of attaining immortality, which the lovers can neither attain nor aspire between themselves. This is the failure of love, for the child as well. If the pair of lovers cannot safeguard the place for love as a third term between them, they can neither remain lovers nor give birth to lovers. Something becomes frozen in space-time, with the loss of a vital intermediary and of an accessible transcendental that remains alive. A sort of teleological triangle is put into place instead of a perpetual journey, a perpetual trans-valuation, a permanent becoming. (Irigaray, 2004a: 25-26) [my italics]

In other words, Irigaray implies that time is indicative of the space in which it passes. Where the topology is closed time is unable to move beyond its sealed horizon-al boundaries. Thus, ricocheting back upon itself, time forms a constant loop (or 'teleological triangle') in which all action is, for all intents and purposes, merely a duplication of what has come before. Time in this scenario is in a sense 'dead'. Hence the subject within such time is obstructed from envisioning (let alone accomplishing) a future that stretches beyond the limits of present experience (which through the western subject's myopic gaze appears to comprise everything that ever was, is or will be, thus deluding him into the belief that he is omniscient, that he is God). Shielded from the knowledge of each one's boundless potential, the subject is prevented from becoming all that they can be (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

> …the whole is sealed up in a circle. Nothing new happens, only this permanent weaving between the world and the subject. Which supposes that the subject sees the whole, that he is the clairvoyant seeing of everything with nothing left over – neither of the world nor of himself. (Irigaray, 2004a: 152)

Correspondingly, Irigaray suggests that where the topology is open, time is fully attuned to the spontaneity and fluidity of life. Granted unrestricted flow within horizons whose boundaries are always partially open, always in flux, future-time – utterly uninscribed yet rooted in an

indelible past – lays itself bare before each human being, inviting each one to project their imagination beyond the strictures of what was and is and thereby opening the way for each one's unrestricted and unique becoming (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a).

Needless to say such a temporal mode, in keeping with the complexity of human existence, is itself many layered. That is to say, the unbroken flow of Irigaray's time is neither merely linear nor cyclical – it is both and more. Though let us at this point catch up with Arendt and in particular her ethical reimagining of western space and time before uniting the intricate and multiple spatial and temporal dimensions of both thinkers in a way that is conducive to a world(s) of sexuate plurality.

As we have touched upon in Chapter 3, Arendt's ethical project centres on the world, the realm of human existence, as opposed to the earth, the realm of biological life (including homo sapient life). The different temporal modalities she accords to each (i.e., linear worldly time and cyclical earthly time) must be kept separate lest the world's time get drawn into the vortex of the earth's circular heartbeat, thus spelling an end to the world (which is to say, our humanness) itself (Arendt, 1998). Of course, time still strides ahead in the event of world collapse – 'watches and calendars ke[ep] on functioning' (Tatman, 2011: 3) – but it is no longer a 'worldly' time in which past, present and future come together to provide the temporal coherence required for the generation and retention of human meaning. Consequently, the emptiness and inconsistency experienced in unworldly linear time compels us even more so to give ourselves over to the cyclical, earthly time that has become the dominant temporal mode; to wrap ourselves in its reassuring predictability (Arendt, 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

To further explain: Firstly, from an Arendtian spatial aspect, where worldly time gives way, the relational/autonomous spaces which lie between each human being, affording each the ability to cultivate and disclose her/his unique self (i.e., the very spaces of which the world is comprised) dissolve, thus collapsing human life in all its infinite diversity into a single undifferentiated entity: homo sapiens. And as we have seen, in such an instance human communication and relation cannot but give way to estrangement and isolation – both from one another and ourselves (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

In such a post-world space (or dearth of space) time for Arendt no longer lends human life a sense of continuity or relatedness. That is, time no longer enables each necessarily unique

human being to relate to one another or their world via a shared understanding (though one open to infinite interpretation, as we shall see) of what has passed, how it shapes the present and how it is expected to shape the future. Such time no longer lends human life its humanness. Rather, because the primary tempo to which we move through a demised worldly space is, as has been mentioned above, circular in motion, our existence is reduced to a perpetual cycle of consumption in which we never progress beyond the level of needs (a point which shall be returned to in depth). This tempo, for Arendt, utterly corresponds to our animal nature at the expense of our humanness. Thus, in a post-world space, inward-looking and immersed in need we are closed to the other and, as such, largely obstructed from rebuilding our world via the generation of meaningful discussions on how past, present and anticipated future events might come together and what they might signify in human, worldly terms (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

Consequently, where there is no general consensus over the facts of an event let alone its meaning (for without significant communicative exchange, consensus is impossible) – that is, where we fail to form the narratives which contextualise an event and make it comprehensible, bearable, human – such an event is reduced to a mere random happening. Thus, to reiterate, linear time in this situation, though it still passes, constitutes no more than a series of seemingly disconnected occurrences (for, again, without significant communicative exchange, we cannot meaningfully draw the connections) (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

So, linear though such time may be, without its worldly framework it is powerless to bind us together and orient us as human. Swept along by the flow of a meaningless linear current, all the while turned away from one another, we are propelled from one event to the next at a giddying pace and without the means for sufficient reflection, either inwardly or with others. As a result our relatedness becomes more and more tenuous, our grip on reality more and more suspect (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011). How this plays out in real life is described, in part, by Tatman below,

> …the meaningful content of the days of our world is increasingly resembling a kind of homage to the absurd…For example, banks that have engaged in unscrupulous lending and investment practises are

> rewarded, while increasing numbers of people are made jobless, homeless, and desperate… (Tatman, 2011: 3)

Thus, to reflect on the above, we can see that, as with Irigaray's philosophy, standing out clearly in Arendt's thought is time's relation/assimilation to the kind of space (or spacelessness) in which it operates. That is, where space becomes inhospitable to human need, Arendt sees that time, too, becomes inhuman. However, there is little argument that the most prominent feature in this area of Arendt's thought is the indissoluble connection between time and meaning. To reiterate, where human beings (through the exchange of necessarily unique ideas, opinions and perspectives) *collectively* perceive time as a continuous, gapless stream in which the present is always rolling into the past and the future is always rolling into the present, they are able to securely orient themselves as beings-in-relation within a temporal zone that unites them by lying both behind and before them. Which is to say (among other things) such beings-in-relation are able to reaffirm their humanness by virtue of each other's presence within the same space-time [40] – a worldly space-time formed and fortified via the creation of widely shared dialogues, narratives and meanings (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

Therefore the temporal cohesion of Arendtian worldly time not only reinforces our humanness, it also reassuringly buffers us from the threat of the unknown that lurks just beyond these temporal perimeters – an unknown identifiable in such questions as, 'Who made God?' or 'What existed before the Big Bang?' or 'Does the universe have an expiration date?'; an unknown which must be kept at a safe distance lest our humanness and the meaning we vest in it be called into question via overwhelming feelings of insignificance. In her essay, *Ruminations on Time (2005-2009)*, Tatman illuminates how grappling with time's remotest boundaries threatens to knock off-balance one's certainty of self and world.

> The calendar in my electronic organiser…is prepared to scroll all the way to 9999. I am not. It's too distant, too long away; it makes me woozy if I really think about it. (Tatman, 2010: 352)

[40] To repeat Arendt's aforementioned quote, 'No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings' (Arendt, 1998: 22).

So while we have thus far seen an emphasis in Arendt's worldly temporality on that which lies both behind and before us (though not too far behind or too far before), hence relating us at the most basic level through a shared understanding of time's passage, it would be a mistake to regard the present tense of Arendt's worldly time as a mere flicker of an instance or as an interval subordinate to a more weighty past and future. For in an ideal Arendtian world the present – that which is immediately relevant – *encompasses* both past and future (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011; 2010).

To explain, on the one hand the present tense of worldly time stretches back to include the immense store of preserved memories and structures of generations past (hence Arendt's fondness for the famous William Faulkner quote, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.'). Namely, Arendt understands that when we 'tell time together' (to borrow Tatman's phrase [2011]), what happens 'now' is made meaningful because it is understood in light of what is generally agreed to have happened prior to 'now' (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

On the other hand, the present tense of Arendt's envisaged worldly time also stretches ahead to incorporate what is anticipated to unfold from the 'now'. For the narratives we create, when they are at their most worldly, contain among other things the promises we make to one another concerning the future, thus forming 'islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty' (Arendt, 1998: 244). Such promises, therefore, bind the future to the present/past, which is another way of saying they allow the present to extend outwardly into the future. In so doing, the act of promising between necessarily unique beings-in-relation has the potential to prevent temporal cracks through which our world and the human meaning that is its substance may be lost (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

And at this juncture it is worth clarifying that Arendtian promise, which in a sense is an attempt to 'fix' the future, does not equate to any line of deterministic thinking. Rather, Arendt's concept of promise affirms both the ultimate indeterminateness of what has not yet occurred. As such, it is the very antithesis of even the softest versions of determinism (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011). As she clarifies,

> The unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a twofold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the

> "darkness of the human heart" that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act. (Arendt, 1998: 244)

The human/worldly need for an extended, extensive present – one which reaches the furthest imaginable or mythed-about points of past and future (and because such points are the stuff of imagination or myth, they are more or less free from the dehumanising effects of 'the unknown') – is clarified below by Tatman who refers to both points as the 'then' of the beginning and the 'then' of the end (Arendt, 1998; 1976: 460-479; 1993: 173-196; Tatman, 2011).

> [I]t seems that 'then', both 'thens', must be set at a sufficient distance from each other and from 'now' in order for 'now's meaningfulness to maintain its fullness. I think that whenever a 'then' is deemed to be rapidly approaching, to be in too intimate a relation with 'now' – at those times 'now' seems to leak like a sieve, its meaning displaced, emptied out by the approach of an immensely more meaningful 'then'. (Tatman, 2010: 353)

Thus, in a 'shrunken' present, what is of immediate relevance no longer connects to 'now'. What we have done, what we are doing, what has unfolded and what is unfolding places no ethical obligations on us to repair (or even acknowledge) past harms or to act mindfully to prevent harm in the present (and hence future). Consequently, where past and present do not relate to what is deemed to be an imminent and far more meaningful future, any promises we make to one another regarding our forthcoming actions are, from the get-go, undermined. For, aside from the fact that such promises are divorced from reality (i.e., blind to the material relevance of 'now'), the risk of making an *empty* promise necessarily multiplies when it is made in an 'empty' present: in a 'now' which has had its meaning displaced (Tatman, 2010).

The west's increasing dissociation between past, present and future (which, as we have seen in Chapter 3 is, for Arendt, akin to a world that 'has lost its power to gather [us] together, to relate and to separate [us]' (Arendt, 1998: 52-53)) is made ever clearer in Tatman's analysis of Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay, *Women's Time*. Namely Tatman considers Kristeva's now thirty(ish) year old claim that, to the detriment of European culture (among other things), the masculine character of linear time (sharp, undeviatingly precise and striding ever forward into the future

– a temporality which propels man to 'boldly go where no man has gone before'[41]) is prioritised over the co-existing feminine temporal modalities of cyclical time (a modality reminiscent of '… cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature…' [Kristeva, 1981: 16]) and monumental time (a modality which, due to its assimilation to those astounding structures of nature that have stood, little changed, for many millions of years – e.g., the Himalayas – moves so infinitesimally slowly that it appears not to be moving at all and, hence, becomes the often overlooked backdrop for all other kinds of more fleeting temporal activity) (Tatman, 2010).

While Tatman agrees with Kristeva that linear time is indeed saturated with masculine values and, as such, prized in the west over the 'non-progressive' feminine temporal modalities of 'aimless' cyclicality and 'passive' monumentality, she (Tatman) notes that at her time of writing in the mid to late 2010s there is little if anything remaining of the kind of linear time that, in 1979, could be taken as given by Kristeva. In other words Tatman identifies the chasms which have opened up between the past, present and future within recent western culture – chasms which defy the perpetual 'onwards and upwards' motion that, until relatively recently, characterised linear time and, hence, helped give us our bearings *as human* (Tatman, 2010).

> [L]inear time … is no longer. That is, there is no longer a time of linear progress, of positive development, a time of social, national and international improvement into which any subjects could attempt to gain entry. The shiny happy always-getting-better future promised by linear time simply is no more. In its place we are now assured of rising sea levels, extreme flooding and catastrophic droughts...species' extinction…nuclear waste…famine, starvation, epidemics and mass human migrations, which will lead in turn to regional armed conflicts over scarce resources like water, kindness, grain, compassion vegetables, and so on… Tellingly, I know of no one who imagines that things will only get better. (Tatman, 2010: 347)

Thus, overwhelmed by the unstemmable tide of life-threatening events – which in the 21st century have become a veritable tsunami and which, for the most part, are the consequences of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, ill-thought-out human action – man is no longer able

[41] Quote borrowed with affection from the opening monologue of *Star Trek* (the early years) – a sci-fi show where, with each episode, one more mystery of the greater universe surrenders itself to the intrepid Captain James T. Kirk and crew.

to honestly convince himself of his absolute mastery. The teleology which once assured his swift and unhesitating progress whilst confirming his seat at the pinnacle of creation has been (and continues to be) dashed against the rocks with each wave of increasingly uncontrollable and destructive worldly and earthly happenings (Tatman, 2010).

> [T]he time of Bacon's 'masculine birth' has come to a halt. The son no longer tells the time. (Tatman, 2010: 347)

Thus the historical timeline emerging from this now defunct teleology – a timeline along which man was able to reassure himself of his supreme being-ness – has spun apart. Yesterday no longer guarantees a rosy tomorrow and to dwell in the present is to be in the eye of the storm, cut adrift from any meaningful shared conception of what has been and what is anticipated to be. In other words, the 21st century is fast becoming devoid of the coherent narratives we *need* in order to make sense of our lives as humans, in order to recognise the intrinsic human value in one's self and others (Tatman, 2010).

That this is, in particular, a 21st century problem – that the rapidly shrinking present is a phenomenon peculiar to this century alone – gives us further insight into the calamitous events which have so impacted on our world in recent times, namely: the undeniable causative relationship between the advances we have made and continue to make in technology and the escalation, in both quantity and quality, of events which threaten the survival of both earth and world. For we have well and truly reached the age of the computer in which the tools of our making process data and manufacture goods at a speed far in excess of either an earthly or worldly pace (Tatman, 2010).

The above is not to deny that the quality of many a human life (particularly in the west and not least my own) has improved no end due to the presence of modern technology (for I am profoundly grateful that, unlike my grandmother at my age, I do not have to rely on muscle power and a washboard for clean clothes, and I am certain that my loved ones and I owe our lives, many times over, to the miracles of modern medicine). Yet, we must equally acknowledge the many human (and non-human) lives that needlessly suffer and/or are cut short due to the increasingly ravaging effects of hi-tech industry (just some examples: the cluster bombs being dropped on Syria; the toxic mud of Indonesia resulting from gas drilling; the climate-change-induced rising sea levels wiping out entire Pacific Island communities; the

rising dioxin levels in fish rendering inedible what is a staple food for many of the globe's populations). Consequently, our advancing-by-leaps-and-bounds technology is no longer the solution to widespread suffering and premature death it was once held out to be. On the contrary, more and more its reckless application can be seen as underlying such phenomena (but to go any further into this now would be to encroach upon Chapter 5 in which such discussions are resumed in depth).

Put plainly, we have reached a stage of such technological onslaught that nature can no longer sustain itself, nor can human beings exercise adequate judgement. Long before we have had a chance to even think about the probable consequences of a proposed action, the technology supposedly in our service and at our command is likely to have already acted, with the initial consequences of such actions having long-since passed. Ultimately then, the ongoing technological revolutions of today add further perplexity to a world that has already lost its temporal cohesion. And that we have, especially in the current millennium, become subordinate to technology – an eventuality of our 'rebelling against human existence as it has been given' (Arendt, 1998: 2) – creates a circumstance in which we simply cannot get our human bearings however hard we try (Tatman, 2010). One of the major aspects of such disorientation is illuminated by Tatman below,

> But all the while the Digital Age is digiting away, the Information Era is informationing, and there's so much to take in and we cannot, any one of us, possibly keep up. Blink, and you've fallen behind. Dare to take a nap and you awake hopelessly out of date. (Tatman, 2010: 345)

In other words, keeping up with a present of such scant dimensions is an around-the-clock, exhausting and ultimately futile endeavour. Where it is achieved it is only for a relatively short duration and, even then, there is never enough time to properly contemplate what has happened let alone share one's contemplations with others (and vice versa). It is little wonder, then, that we in the west are increasingly giving ourselves over to the hum of what Arendt refers to as vacant time – i.e., a way of whiling away the time that, as we shall see, is central to an existence which has prioritised a cyclical temporality wherein the circular processes of consumption (as opposed to the linear process of human development) reigns supreme (Arendt, 1993; Tatman, 2010).

To further explain, the cycle of consumption within which Arendt locates the west is clearly recognisable with respect to our biological demands. For example: we get hungry, we eat, our bodies convert what we have eaten into energy, we expend this energy, we get hungry again …. and the process repeats itself ad infinitum. Yet, as Arendt reveals, the encroachment of cyclical time upon the west is just as evident with respect to the priorities of the social realm – priorities in which the need to escape a harsh and confusing reality (and, in so doing, evade all political responsibility) by way of relatively trivial diversions takes over every aspect of our lives (Arendt, 1993; Tatman, 2010).

> Mass society …. wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just like any other consumer goods. The products needed for entertainment serve the life process of society, even though they may not be as necessary for this life as bread and meat. They serve, as the phrase is, to while away time, and the vacant time which is whiled away is not leisure time, strictly speaking – time, that is, in which we are freed *from* all cares and activities necessitated by the life process and therefore free *for* the world and its culture – it is rather left-over time, which still is biological in nature, left over after labor and sleep have received their due. (Arendt, 1993: 202)

Throughout this process, then, we are utterly focussed on the self (and/or the selves in our care). Thus there is no looking beyond the self to what remains (if anything) of the world. Consequently, where cyclical time holds sway and linear time has ceased to be 'told together' (Tatman, 2011), the possibility for world renewal slips further from our reach (Arendt, 1998; Tatman, 2010).

Therefore in Arendt's perspective a world which thrives – a world that comprises a space-time conducive to human flourishing – is one in which our biological needs (our cyclical needs) have been balanced with our human needs; one in which our commitment to world renewal takes absolute precedence (such commitment comprising our continued maintenance of a shared understanding amongst unique beings of a seamless and lineal past, present and future; an understanding, that is, in which the meaning of our lives is firmly grounded in a collective awareness of what has *been*, what *is* and what is *not yet* (Arendt, 1998; Tatman, 2010).

And at this point it is important to clarify that a shared understanding of a fact or event, regardless of tense, is *not* one wherein individual perspectives are made to conform to a single viewpoint. There could be no stance less Arendtian. Rather, to share an understanding is to collectively acknowledge the existence of a thing at its most fundamental level. How we perceive the thing that has been collectively acknowledged shall differ from one unique being to the next. Thus, in a cohesive and inclusive world, each thing is accompanied by a plethora of interpretations and/or ideas as to what that thing means. That is, the relational spaces of an ideal Arendtian world function as conduits through which we can exchange our unique perspectives (Arendt, 1998), through which we can tell time *together* (Tatman, 2011). Only in this way are we able to supplement each other's points of view, thereby creating for all the richest and most concrete sense of reality possible (Canovan, 1977).

For example, that the Holocaust *happened*, that at least 6 million Jews were systematically murdered in the most orchestrated act of genocide the world has yet known, is a thing – a *reality* – that must be acknowledged. It is a fact of history and, as such, exists independently of any opinions or beliefs that may be formed in relation to it. Yet, it is only when this fact, once commonly acknowledged, is made sense of through a significant number of different interpretations and perspectives that its reality is truly solidified – that is, made part of the common world (provided, of course, that there is substantial, which is to say *public*, exchange of those interpretations/perspectives) (Arendt, 1998).

> The others who see what we see and hear what we hear assure us of the reality of the world and ourselves… (Arendt, 1998: 50)

That how we each view and make sense of this single event will necessarily vary due to our different worldly locations – our unique perspectives. Yet such variation does not negate the Holocaust's factualness. On the contrary, it is only *because* of the uniqueness pertaining to each (publically voiced) perspective that a new facet of the Holocaust is able to be revealed, thus adding breadth and depth to its worldly reality. It may be that such a newly revealed facet alters one's own understanding, thus providing one with a transformed perspective, or it may be that such a facet exists in stark contradiction to one's own understanding of the Holocaust. But, in the case of the latter, a disagreement arises as to the *meaning* of the Holocaust, how it *ought* to be understood or interpreted, not to the basic fact of its having occurred.

Indeed, by virtue of each one's uniqueness, every factual thing or event will be the subject of disagreement at one time or another, albeit *meaningful* disagreement [42] – i.e., one capable of sustaining the narratives we require for human comprehension, temporal cohesion and worldly stability (Arendt, 1976: 460-479; 1993; 1994b); one, that is, which aids in the humanising practice of trying to make sense of our shared world – of seeking to continually *understand* it:

> Understanding is the specifically human way of being alive; for every single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which [s/]he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of [her/]his distinct uniqueness, [s/]he always remains a stranger. (Arendt, 1994b: 308)

It is only when a fact (especially one of momentous proportions like the Holocaust) is flatly denied (e.g., '[the Holocaust] is the greatest swindle of all time'[43]) or utterly forgotten (for the survival of a narrative depends upon its continued remembrance through reification) that one's capacity to understand – one's ability to reconcile oneself to the world – gives way to a world-depleting meaninglessness. In this instance, voices are silenced while stories go untold. The world becomes smaller, less inclusive and ultimately, if the denial or forgetfulness is widespread enough, it is as if the fact never was (Arendt, 1993; 1994b; 1998).

And when, in this way, a chunk of our world goes missing (both temporally and spatially) those who lived through the fact or its aftermath are left stranded in a dehumanising abyss of irreality: great swathes of their lives unresolved through an absence of worldly validation. A section of worldly time is thus brought to a standstill, for when something is not even acknowledged as having *been*, there is no possibility of moving forward from that point. In turn, the world's space-time becomes fragmented throwing everyone into a state of temporal dislocation (Arendt, 1976: 460-479).

Such is our current situation in the west. Hence the ethical obligation upon each and every one of us, insofar as we are able, to repair the ruptures in worldly time and thereby repair the world. To quote Arendt (who quotes Shakespeare),

---

[42] My especial thanks to Lucy Tatman for introducing me to her idea of 'meaningful disagreement' within the context of Arendt's philosophy.

[43] This quote is taken from a series of anti-Semitic leaflets which recently infiltrated the grounds of a neighbouring university. For more information, see http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/flyers-claiming-holocaust-was-a-fraud-found-at-melbourne-uni-20160303-gnabwg.html

> Whoever takes upon [her/]himself political responsibility will always come to the point where [s/]he says with Hamlet:
>
> *The time is out of joint: O cursed spite*
> *That ever I was born to set it right!* (Arendt, 2003: 27-28)

Setting time aright requires our unflinching acknowledgement of what is or has been (however unbearable a task that may be at times), to endure these facts (however incomprehensible they may immediately seem) and to allow their always fluid meanings to come gradually into focus through the stories we weave from them – stories which go on to form part of the world's fabric (Arendt, 2003: 17-48).

So the question for us at this point of the current chapter is: How can we use what we have learnt above to construct (at least conceptually to begin with) a space-time relevant to a world of sexuate-plurality? That is, how can we think anew a space-time capable of remedying a century which seems more and more likely to be marked by an overwhelming acceleration in climate change, climate change denial, political deception, mass civilian casualties, the threat of nuclear war, radioactive contamination, grand-scale dispossession and impoverishment, etc.?

In looking at this question we must first consider what we are, by now, fairly certain of: that the myriad of problems unique to the 21st century point to an underlying denial of sexuate difference and a false notion of human superfluousness. Undoubtedly then, we need to take up the Arendtian task of re-establishing a time that we can tell *together* as necessarily unique individuals (Tatman, 2011). But to do this and only this risks returning us to a temporal mode of the kind Kristeva wrote about in 1979 – an inherently masculine mode which charges ever forward, always looking ahead to bigger and better things; a temporal testament to Man's unsurpassed greatness and one which utterly disregards our inherent need – both as humans and as earthly creatures – to also dwell within the co-existing temporal modes of cyclicality and monumentality (Tatman, 2010; 2011).

For as crucial as Arendt's ethical philosophy is to the gross inequities of the present day, we cannot deny its privileging of linear time comes at the expense of cyclical time (eschewed by Arendt as that which must be kept at bay) and monumental time (a deeply spiritual, cosmos-aligned temporal mode on which Arendt remains silent). Thus, life as it is given – in terms of

our everyday corporeal, creaturely existence which adheres to the circular rhythms of nature *and* in terms of the greater universe of which we are, for the briefest of moments, a small but interrelated part – is put to one side in Arendt's thought (and this is despite her, at times explicit, gratitude for the given) (Arendt, 1998). Consequently, without these feminine temporal modes with which to balance it, Arendt's linear time (as ideally envisaged by her), unable to extricate itself from the masculine values in which it is steeped, cannot rightfully attest to the existence of woman *as* woman. That is, Arendt's temporal philosophy lacks the sense that, for a truly rich and shared world, we have to tell time together not only as unique beings but as *sexuately different, unique beings* (Tatman, 2010; 2011).

Thus it is through Irigaray that we are able relieve some of the tensions within Arendt's space-time without jeopardising the fact for which she (Arendt) ultimately stands (and which is vital to an ethics of sexuate plurality): each one's unrepeatable uniqueness. For as we have seen, Irigaray's space-time is grounded in sexuate difference. Hence, all individual uniquenesses necessarily stem from this foundation. *Contra* Arendt, such grounding is made possible due to Irigaray's unequivocal reverence of nature, both as it corresponds to the cycles of life and to our vast cosmos (Irigaray, 2002a).

Namely, Irigaray recognises that in order to be and become human we must take sufficient time to relate to the natural world that is *a priori* to our humanness and from which our humanness is necessarily cultivated. This requires the occasional stepping out of linear time (a stepping out of the world) so that we may pause, contemplate our connection with the cosmos and give thanks for our universe and our small but significant place within it. In other words, so that we may *spiritualise* the self by bringing it in harmony with the cosmos of which we are a part. Such an act which, though unworldly in itself, is conducive to a thriving world wherein each human life is deemed sacred as opposed to expendable (Irigaray, 2002a).

Indeed, what constitutes the sacred for Irigaray is life itself: human life, yes, but also the abundance of other life forms and natural elements that make up the universe and with which human beings are necessarily in relation. Life is given to us, *gifted* to us. From the perspectives of ethics and of happiness – both things inextricably interwoven in Irigaray's thought (Irigaray, 2004b: 230-234) – it *matters* that we cultivate it, that we live in ways which affirm this gift and allow it to flourish – allow *us* to flourish (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

In a western culture preoccupied with death, re-orienting our perspective to one in which all life is sacred is especially fraught. Yet Irigaray is unwavering in her appeal that we each re-consider life – our own, each other's, and the planet's – in the light of the sacred and make holy that which to date in the west has more often than not been relegated to realm of the profane. Which is to say, Irigaray asks us to honour and revere life as it is given to us and to act towards it and amongst it with thoughtfulness and deference (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

Therefore, in recognising and honouring the sacredness of life, it is, says Irigaray, ethically incumbent upon each person to take up the task of becoming divine. Or, to perhaps state it more accurately, it is the task of each person to recover the divinity they received at birth by virtue of being born,[44] but which thereafter lay dormant in a western culture that views corporeal existence as inherently profane while relegating the spiritual to a God on high – thereby creating an Absolute wholly separate from the human realm and just as inaccessible (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

> It seems, however, that God is still too often evoked as a real entity, even if we cannot perceive him. He functions as a kind of idol of the spirit, resistant to perception by the senses, requiring that we rise up to him through our faith, and through renunciations that make us unknown to ourselves – or even our own enemies – as opposed to giving us confidence in our divine possibilities. (Irigaray, 2004b: 172)

Accordingly, in the current western paradigm wherein we are all children of God the Father, we deprive ourselves of the possibility of autonomy and, with it, accountability. What this means is that, in a sense, we do not hold ourselves fully responsible for our actions. We either obey or disobey the Law of the Father but such Law is not ours to question. A certain degree

[44] In exploring further the Irigarayan concept of divine breath, Emily A. Holmes writes:

> For Luce Irigaray, to become fully human is to become divine, and becoming divine is best accomplished through the cultivation of the breath. Whereas the masculine subject (in the West) has denied the creative power (*puissance*) of the mother, switched the gender, and ascribed it to a masculine God who creates using his breath, Irigaray finds in biblical passages describing the breath and spirit of God a tacit recognition of the spiritual powers of the mother and the potential of breathing as a path to divinization (Irigaray 2004, p. 196). She describes this path as a kind of rebirth and creativity that is autonomously undertaken for oneself. (Holmes, 2013: 39)

of thoughtlessness (the very kind that Arendt rails against) risks accompanying each of our actions within such a mindset (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

The potential harm of this situation is obviously compounded by the fact that, in this paradigm, earthly life here and now is devalued in favour of an envisaged ethereal life hereafter. Moreover, any acts or gestures of compassion or empathy made under the authority of God the Father run the risk of sliding into the kind of paternalism on which the western Judeo-Christian paradigm is modelled. In this way, we are obstructed in our capacity as *relational* beings (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

For Irigaray, it is essential that we relate to each person as an *other of the other* in order for us to become divine and for our universe to be held as sacred. To do this, she states, we need to create spaces – horizons – within which to develop our individual selves while remaining in relation to the other. In this way, the irreducible difference between us is not only able to be clearly perceived, but preserved as sacrosanct (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

> *Individual development* cannot be closed off in one unique truth, morality, or cult – all offspring of the same religious family, or at times the same politico-religious family – but *must be linked to the developments of relations to the other as other*. (Irigaray, 2004b: 172)

In charging each of us with the ethical task of re-imagining the sacred so that it encompasses life as it is given to us – sensate, embodied, sexuately specific, and transient – Irigaray places a special responsibility on women. For woman, who is not made in the image of God the Father, has no divine ideal to aid in spiritualising her in her becoming. As both the cause and consequence, western religion neglects the fact of human sexuate difference. In so doing, it has not only obstructed the possibility of an independent female divinity (i.e., one which does not rely on a proximation to God-Father or God-Son, as is the case with Mary), it has presented the greatest obstacle to realising the possibility of a world wherein we each relate to the other as *other of the other* – both corporeally and spiritually (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88). As Irigaray states:

> *A spiritual relationship between the sexes would allow us to reunite human and divine elements that have been artificially separated by the*

> *domination of one sex over the other*, by the dominance of the values of one sex over those of the other. (Irigaray, 2004b: 174)

It is clear to Irigaray that a spiritual relationship between the sexes can only be made possible if women are first able to rediscover and develop the divine within themselves – a divine that is not modelled on God the Father and, thus, bears little relation to them. But one which shares their particular morphology. An entity, a deity, that can serve as a horizon within which women can become *as* women through their interrelation and communication with each other (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

> If women have no God, they are unable either to communicate or commune with one another. They need, we need, an infinite if they are to share *a little*. Otherwise sharing implies fusion-confusion, division, and dislocation within themselves, among themselves. If I am unable to form a relationship with some horizon of accomplishment for my gender, I am unable to share while protecting my becoming. (Irigaray, 1993: 62)

This task Irigaray confers upon women, by no means easily achievable in a culture where women *as* women are yet to be, is nevertheless possible despite the challenges presented to it (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88). As Irigaray explains:

> …in our patriarchal monotheistic traditions today, what a man means by the name of God is very different from what a woman means, even if her quest for the absolute is already oriented by necessities proper to the male subject – which paralyses a part of her spiritual energy into a kind of idolatry or passivity. Fortunately women's religious feeling, taking root below men's beliefs and rites, can generally preserve a part of itself. (Irigaray, 2004b: 174)

It is this preserved part of female spirituality that Irigaray urges women to cultivate so that, ultimately, horizontal relations between the different sexes – equal parts corporeal and spiritual – are able to overcome the present hierarchies of the west which precludes all of us, both women and men, from becoming all we can be – divine beings in a sacred universe (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

True to her topological way of thinking, Irigaray describes the act of becoming divine in terms of making a space in the self within which to welcome and cultivate our divinity through our

relations with others, irreducibly different to ourselves (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88). She states:

> Where a written law was used to dictate to my conscience once and for all what had to be done, I now find that *I am required to open up within myself a non-inscribed space, a virgin space*, if you will, *from which I can listen to and welcome the other*, and invent, along with him or her, a relation that goes beyond the elementary imperatives of respect for natural life and for possessions, towards the development of a new kind of spiritual relation to the other. (Irigaray, 2004b: 175)

Divinity for Irigaray, then, is inherently relational. It grows through our regarding ourselves and those around us as an *other of the other*, and it relies on the preservation of the irreducible difference that lies between us – particular with respect to sexuate difference, "the most universal example" (Irigaray, 2004b: 173) of difference (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1993: 57-88).

> Development is thus accomplished through the search for a personal absolute that accepts being questioned, modified, and fecundated by the development of the other towards their absolute. (Irigaray, 2004b: 173)

Consequently, where one abstains from cultivating one's spirituality – i.e., from properly honouring both the cosmos and the self (as a cosmic being) – it is to the detriment of all aspects of existence, not least its worldly, human aspects: a point especially illuminated by Irigaray in her writings on the breath. *The breath*: at once ethereal and corporeal, it represents our greatest potential to become in a new world (a third age) where we are each and always, in our sensible transcendence, divine other of the divine other (Irigaray, 2002a; 2004b).

> Centred on the divinization of humanity incarnated and not on representations of divinity – images, various figurations, abstract ideals, dead words: all kinds of idols – our epoch has to return to an awareness and to a cultivation of the breath before and beyond any representation and discourse. The accomplishment of humanity, its perfect realization, requires the cultivation of one's own breath as divine presence, in ourselves and between us. (Irigaray, 2004b: 169)

Space, as that which lies between us and unfurls fluidly around us. As that which allows us to receive the other whilst maintaining our own autonomy – our own sexuate specificity and irreplaceable uniqueness… Time, as that which flows unbroken and uninterrupted, uniting us as human beings in a shared what was, what is and what might be. Orienting us as earthly beings who are one with nature, moving to the circular rhythms of birth, death and rebirth. Affirming our existence as cosmic beings, infinitesimal life forms within an infinitely vast cosmos, yet beings with a spiritual and tangible connectedness to all that is. Such is the potential space-time of a world(s) of sexuate plurality – a world borne out a 21st century feminist ethics in which the message of Arendt and Irigaray comprise its core.

Chapter 5 – Earth / Nature Ethics

My intention in this chapter is to explore the writings pertaining to the natural world within the respective philosophies of Arendt and Irigaray in order to show that our human being-ness is both founded in and intrinsically connected to nature. Through such explorations it will become clear that for the sake of a rich and replete human experience, we must fully understand, acknowledge and respect this most fundamental aspect of our existence. And while I am aware that any reference to nature is fraught with difficulty – for, how we define nature in the west is necessarily formed through a certain cultural perspective and, as such, prone to all manner of western bias, ranging from romanticism to revilement – it is nevertheless a pre-human phenomenon and the basis of all existence. It must, therefore, form a significant part of any ethical philosophy, despite its susceptibility to skewing via cultural construction.

Our explorations shall begin with a close look at Arendt's concept of 'earth' as the natural realm which, by and large, she defines in contrast to her conception of the cultural realm, or as she terms it, 'world' (Arendt, 1998: 52). And, while it will become evident that Arendt firmly situates herself within the dichotomous tradition of the west by placing nature as the lesser of two terms within a binary of 'nature/culture', she also departs from tradition through her understanding of nature as a 'free gift from nowhere' (Arendt, 1998: 2-3), as opposed to the dominant western view of nature as immanent matter to be mastered by Man. Moreover, she further sets herself apart from her contemporaries with her appeal that, for the sake of our humanness, we receive this gift with *gratitude* and treat it with reverence, rather than see it as a fetter from which we must free ourselves (Arendt, 1998: 265). Interestingly, she makes this appeal in favour of nature for the sake of our humanness without locating any aspect of our humanity within her conception of nature.

We will then turn to the thought of Irigaray who, like Arendt, also views nature as a free gift which should be met with abounding gratitude and reverence (Irigaray, 2015: 101-108). Yet, in a radical move, Irigaray sees nature and culture as a continuum within the human experience. That is, we are firstly natural beings. We are mammals, reliant on the earth for life, and share the planet with an unknown number of other life forms. Our culture – what makes us human – necessarily grows from this natural foundation. For Irigaray, there is no dichotomy wherein nature and culture are severed from one another and thereafter hierarchically ordered. One

flows from the other in a continuous, unbroken link. Namely, we are *sensible* beings, in that we experience and relate to the world and each other as corporeal presences – i.e., through touch, taste, smell, sight and sound. Yet we are also *transcendent* beings: through mind and spirit, desire and the breath, we let unfold a specifically human culture that transcends our primary existence yet remains ever in connection with it. What Irigaray appeals for then is for a human existence whereby we consciously develop a culture that is in *harmony* with the nature it necessarily arises out of. In bringing together Arendtian gratitude and the Irigarayan 'sensible transcendental' I seek to show the centrality of nature to the ethic of sexuate plurality I am seeking to establish.

The forgetting of our natural foundations

There is an affinity between the conception of nature in Irigaray's thought and the conception of the earth in Arendt's thought. In their own distinct ways both thinkers recognise that in the west we have to our detriment forgotten that the natural, earthly world always precedes the human world (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992; Arendt, 1998). That is, the west has forgotten that the human world grows out of the natural world and, as such, contains an element of nature within its every fibre. The immediate upshot of this forgetting is a lack of understanding that we are *relational* beings: that we are connected to one another and, indeed, to the whole universe. Without this understanding our actions all too often veer towards the wanton destruction of each other and our planet. Moreover, each one's human becoming, when it occurs in ignorance of earth and nature's primary status, is skewed and incomplete: a pseudo-becoming at best.

Yet, how to redirect western thought in a way which respectfully acknowledges our natural origins without reducing us to them? For, as Irigaray reveals, woman as she is presently defined in the west is already nature (albeit a limited concept of nature) – she is in desperate need of access to the human realm (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). Could a new focus on nature within western thought bridge instead of broaden the distance between woman and her rightful claim to humanness? At the same time Arendt makes clear that our humanness, by its very definition, stands in direct contrast to our status as earthly creatures (Arendt, 1998). Could our human world survive an 'anti-anthropocentric' (ecocentric?) logic in which each person stands in deference to the non-human, natural world? I think the answer to both of these questions is yes. For by carefully interweaving certain strands of Irigaray's thoughts on nature with Arendt's

thoughts on earth, a new ethics of earth and nature begins to emerge – an ethics wherein human attentiveness to the needs of the natural world reinforces, rather than depletes, the unqualified human status of each and every person be they woman, man or gender-fluid (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992; Arendt, 1998).

Arendt's 'Earth'

Let us begin the process of developing an Earth/Nature ethics by first considering Arendt's thoughts on our present relationship to the earth. As discussed in Chapter 2 there is a tension within Arendt's philosophy between her condemnation of the west's reckless repudiation of the earth as 'Mother of all living creatures' (Arendt, 1998: 2) and her insistence that in order to preserve our humanness we must keep ourselves at a remove from nature. That is, we must build a human world within our earthly environment in order to shield ourselves from the animalising effects of nature. Implicit in this assertion is Arendt's hierarchical ordering of human life over homo sapient existence. Yet despite this tension – that is, despite the supreme value Arendt places on the achievement of human life – she remains vigilant that our present undoing as human beings has much to do with our increasing disconnection from the earth (Arendt, 1998).

And it is important at this juncture to note that, *because* of the primacy Arendt accords to human life and the cultural world in her philosophy, she devotes only a limited amount of her writing to her thoughts on earth and nature. However, wherever she does so, she makes the implicit, unapologetic appeal that we, as humans, must honour the debt we owe to the earth as the giver of basic life. Therefore, in what follows, we shall examine the relatively few writings Arendt has made with respect to the urgent need for the west to cultivate feelings of gratitude and respect towards the earth before moving onto Irigaray's thoughts on nature, her writings being far more voluminous on this topic. Accordingly, should the following explorations appear to give more space to Irigaray's thoughts, it is simply because she was the more prolific of the two in her writings on earth and nature (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992; Arendt, 1998).

To return to Arendt then: on the face of it, her stance towards the earth seems contradictory, but on closer inspection there is a undeniable logic regarding Arendt's correlation between the increasing failure of the world to gather people together, at once relating and separating them,

and our increasing desire to shed our earthly status, to turn away from any evidence that neither the planet nor ourselves are of our own making – that we are not God, so to speak. So, while her ultimate prioritisation of human existence may reveal a certain wariness towards our earthly, creaturely existence, this does not undermine, at least not completely, her implicit claim that a reconnection to the earth is a necessary part of the process of rebuilding our world (Arendt, 1998).

> The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life [woman and] man remains related to all other living organisms. (Arendt, 1998: 2)

Thus Arendt implies that if we are to fully recover our humanness, we have to accept that we are products of our planet and, as such, we must as earthly creatures and worldly beings live within the limits prescribed by our planet rather than rail against them at every turn. Indeed for Arendt, our humanness is most manifest when it is bathed in the light of a gratitude for the given, of which the earth as the only known home hospitable to human life is the gift most deserving of our thankfulness and respect. Moreover, the urgency of this claim is intensified when we consider that of all earthly activity, *human* activity arguably has the greatest potential to destroy the planet (Arendt, 1998).

In other words, contained within Arendt's philosophy is her claim that our humanness relies on our continued acknowledgement and respect of the natural world of which we are an inseparable part. Moreover, our reverence for nature must be maintained even while we are safeguarding our humanness *against* it. Inherent to this complex assertion is Arendt's insight into the mind of the western subject who, in his desire for immortality, which in turn points to a latent fear of death,[45] seeks to rid himself of all earthly attachments or, as he construes them, fetters (Arendt, 1998). It is through such desire/fear, notes Arendt, that western science is increasingly turning to the task of

[45] See Chapter 4

> [creating] life in the test tube, [of mixing] "frozen germ plasm from people of demonstrated ability under the microscope to produce superior human beings" and "to alter [their] size, shape and function"… (Arendt, 1998: 2)

That is to say, western science is becoming progressively more preoccupied with 'perfecting' nature, with 'inventing' life by artificial means so that man might truly become a self-created being – a God subordinate to nothing or no one – as opposed to his present status as one of the 'children of nature' (Arendt, 1998: 2) where, by necessity, governed by natural laws and limitations. Consequently, Arendt's fear concerning human 'superfluousness' is ever more justified where human life is perceived through the western scientific lens as a mass-producible artefact, amenable to tweaking, fine-tuning and endless replication at the behest of the scientist. Thus, we are at this juncture returned to the point at hand: that the unmarred perception of each one's utter uniqueness – each one's *humanness* – relies on a gratitude for the given of which natural phenomena is the most given of all (Arendt, 1998).

being and appearance

Further illuminating the disconnection of the western subject from its natural/earthly origins/limits are Arendt's writings on the phenomenal quality of our (overlapping) natural and human realms. Namely, Arendt points out that both realms are equally constituted by appearance. Which is to say it is only by virtue of their appearance that the being-objects of earth and/or world are able to be perceived by us through one or more of our five bodily senses (Arendt, 1978: 19-65). As Arendt says,

> The world [women and] men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they *appear* and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. (Arendt, 1978: 19)

Thus, while Arendt is keenly aware that in reality 'Being and Appearance coincide' (Arendt, 1978: 20) she is no less alert to the fact that, despite all sound logic, western philosophy has succeeded in conceptually separating the two. That is, within the dichotomous reasoning of the west, Being is placed in binary opposition to Appearance, and as a consequence, hierarchically

valued over and above it. Hence, in the west Being equals Truth whilst Appearance merely constitutes the site of Being's reviled surplus: what Being is *not*. Accordingly, Being is the privileged term within a Platonic western culture that has made Truth its ultimate quest (Arendt, 1978: 19-65).

To further explain: at least from the time of Plato's allegory of the cave – in which men are blinded to the Truth of their being by a mere shadowy semblance of reality (Plato, 1997) – the western mind has been mistrustful of what is given to it by way of the five bodily senses. Thus, with such doubt hovering over sensual experience it has become western practice to question all surface appearances and to shatter them wherever possible so as to extract the underlying 'Truth' which they are assumed to conceal. Hence Arendt's comment that we have taken Kant's claim that appearances 'must themselves have grounds which are not appearances' (Kant cited in Arendt, 1978: 24) to such a level that we now regard the unseen ground of appearance as infinitely 'more real' than what actually appears (Arendt, 1978: 19-65).

Thus in a culture which privileges the metaphysical, nothing has been more subjected to the practice of having its inner workings laid bare than the basic elements of the natural realm itself (e.g., plant and animal life, soil, water, rock, etc.). For natural phenomena, because it is given to us absolutely, conceals an interior which remains entirely unknown to us so long as its surface stays intact. Consequently, the 'violent invectives against "mere appearances"' (Arendt, 1978: 24) have often led to the equally violent eviscerations of life forms as they are naturally given (Arendt, 1978: 19-65).

Consequently, in the process of peeling away the endless veneers of natural phenomena (for in this mindset, beneath one deceptive surface lies another and so on), respect let alone gratitude for what is given falls by the wayside, thus marring our ability to recognise among other things each necessarily unique person's unconditional claim to full humanity. To illustrate this point of Arendt's by way of a most extreme example, let us briefly consider the actions of Josef Mengele ostensibly made in the name of science during Nazi Germany's reign.

In his authority as a senior SS officer, Mengele subjected a considerable number of Third Reich prisoners to infamous and torturous 'medical' experiments. In the instance that the victim survived, s/he was often left permanently traumatised, disfigured and/or disabled. The ostensible goal of such experimentation was to uncover the 'secrets' of the human body and to

use this information to hasten the production of the so-called master race (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018). However, in actual fact these experiments primarily served to further debase a people already classified by their imprisoners as subhuman. Thus, by way of such violations, the perceptible humanness of *everyone* involved – i.e., "scientist" and "subject" – came to rest upon slippery ground (Arendt, 1976: 460-479).

Namely, viewed by their captors as worthless animals, as superfluous physical/natural matter to be manipulated at will, Mengele's victims were brutally and senselessly treated as such; the material surfaces of their bodies were violated in order to expose the mysteries which lay beneath the skin, tendons, muscle tissue, organs, cartilage, bone... Ironically, by way of their actions Mengele and his accomplices were themselves stripped of their humanity. To elaborate: in such an instance where human uniqueness, worth and dignity is foregone in favour of human superfluity, expendability and replaceable-ness the perpetrator, in attempting to dehumanise the one s/he is acting against, unwittingly dehumanises her/himself (Arendt, 1976: 460-479).

And thus we are returned to the implications of Arendt's claim: when scientific curiosity parts company with a basic gratitude for the given, when the quest for Truth is driven by a desire for absolute mastery, what results is an affront to life wherein the humanness of all ultimately suffers (which is not to discount the suffering this also imposes upon all non-human life as shall be seen below). For if we are to recall Arendt's stance introduced in Chapter 3, each one's humanness depends on the presence of equally human others – where we deny another's immeasurable human worth, we automatically diminish our own in the process (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65; 1976: 460-479).

In reinforcement of Arendt's understanding that perpetrators of human violence inadvertently dehumanise themselves through such acts is discussed by Arendt's biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, who presents a different angle of illumination on the subject:

> The totalitarians themselves became superfluous: they felt themselves to be mere instruments of Nature of History, and as functionaries in concentration camps they were just as inanimate, or soulless, as their victims. (Young-Bruehl, 1982: 221)

And while the above case study looks specifically at the human casualties of a logic which unqualifiedly permits and encourages man's excavation and scrutiny of all perceived natural matter irrespective of harm posed, such logic is of course incredibly dangerous for non-human life-forms and matter. For in the west evidence abounds with respect to excessively damaging human interference of all aspects of our shared eco-system (from the over-mining of the earth to the unforeseen unmanageable consequences of splitting the atom, etc.). Thus Arendt's implicit assertion that where we do *not* eschew, as a matter of principle, life as it appears to us – i.e., where we maintain a gratitude for the given – human intervention into the natural realm (among other realms) is far more likely to err on the side of moderation than excess and, thus, far more likely to honour human dignity and, indeed, the dignity of all life and earthly matter in its many and varied forms (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65).

Thus, in a sense the gratitude to which Arendt appeals sets down an ethical parameter that keeps in check our actions towards other being/objects with whom we are necessarily in relation. Consequently, where we take for granted the very givenness of what is – where there is an absence of gratitude – there are no ethical parameters in place to curb harmful and/or sadistic behaviour towards others, both human and non-human. There is, among other things, no basis of thought that reminds us that we are *relational* beings, related to each other, the world and the earth. Hence, there is nothing that explicitly tells us that we must constantly tend to all such relations if meaningful flourishing is to prevail over senseless destruction (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65).

the solipsist

And where our consciousness regarding our own relationality is lacking – as Arendt notes it is in the west – we become particularly vulnerable to solipsist thinking. That is, each one trusts only in the existence of her/his own consciousness proven to one via her/his internal cognitions. Descartes' maxim, 'I think therefore I am' becomes both the first and last word with respect to what's real. Consequently, the capital 'S' Solipsist can never be certain of the existence of others precisely because those others are necessarily given to her/him by way of appearance (Arendt, 1978: 19-65).

The earth and world together with all the beings, creatures and things that inhabit these spaces are reduced to mere figments of the Solipsist's imagination. Thus, as illusory objects of one's

own mind, the Solipsist has no duty of care – morally, ethically or otherwise – towards the others of world and earth. Accordingly, unconscionable acts of cruelty like those committed by Mengele discussed above are far more likely to occur where the Solipsist not only denies her/his relationality to others but refuses to grant that such others exist in their own right – outside of the Solipsist's proprietorship. This is, as Arendt makes clear, an aspect of what results when Being and Appearance conceptually part ways (Arendt, 1978: 19-65). By bringing the two together again, Arendt quickly dispels any apparent soundness that solipsism may hold:

> …no consciousness of an acting self that had suspended all faith in the reality of its intentional objects, would ever have been able to convince him of his own reality had he actually been born in a desert, without a body and its senses to perceive "material" things and without fellow-creatures to assure him that what he perceived was perceived by them too. The Cartesian res cogitans, this fictitious creature, bodiless, senseless, and forsaken, would not even know that there is such a thing as reality and a possible distinction between the real and the unreal, between the common world of waking life and the private non-world of our dreams. (Arendt, 1978: 48)

In summary then, the western desire to get to the Truth conceptually severs the subject's relational ties to the rest of the universe and from that point on morphs into a desire to master, in particular, the natural world in which he no longer situates himself in any way. At the same time, because western Truth is not based in a reality of which appearance is necessarily a part, the western subject is from the outset disconnected from what actually *is* (Arendt, 1978: 19-65). Accordingly, knowledge of the primary ontological fact that human beings are *plural* beings of at least *two* sexes continues to go wanting, thus frustrating our ability as humans to become all that we can be (Irigaray, 1985).

gratitude for the given

Consequently, in piecing together an ethics of sexuate plurality I suggest we continue with Arendt's message to reconnect with the earth with gratitude (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65). For this makes possible the clearest perception of the simultaneous Being/Appearance of reality and, in turn, the unqualified intrinsic worth of each unique, sexuately specific human being.

At this juncture it is worth making clear that Arendt's call to 'let appearances appear; let the earth be' ought not to be mistaken for a passive human existence which unquestioningly risks itself for the sake of the earth's integrity. Rather, Arendt's stance above all aims to safeguard our human existence. As such, she sanctions the dependence of human life and wellbeing upon other earthly life. She acknowledges that we cannot, in fact, avoid disturbing the integrity of non-human earthly life in order to meet both our creaturely and human needs. However, within her ethics such disturbance is only permitted within moderation, which is to say, within a context of *earth as provider rather than possession* (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65).

Hence, hers is a view which in the course of human survival and flourishing aims to inflict as little harm as possible to the planet and the myriad of life forms with whom we share it (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65). To illustrate by way of some examples, I would consider that Arendtian 'earth ethics' as I have identified them would favour smaller-scale, sustainable logging practices over the indiscriminate deforestation of old-growth forest; humanely reared livestock over factory farmed produce; clothes, furniture and other domestic items that are made to last over consumables designed to deteriorate shortly after their production; a minimisation of animal testing; etc.

Hers is a view, in other words, which implicitly recognises the special obligation that we humans have in caring for the earth in all its majestic diversity. And this is simply because it is we humans who have the greatest capacity, through our technological innovations, to render the earth and all that dwells there extinct. It is indeed our chief ethical obligation and the one upon which all others rest (Arendt, 1998; 1978: 19-65).

So let us here return to the Arendtian tension of our needing to keep the earth at bay all the while remaining significantly connected to it – both actions required for the sake of our humanness among other things. As we have discussed above, there is certainly a degree of unity between these two contrary positions. Nevertheless, there still remains a perceptible gap between both actions which cannot be adequately bridged within the framework of Arendt's philosophy alone. Which is to say that while both humanity and nature are revered in Arendt's thought, the higher value placed on humanity and, thus, the hierarchy that is inevitably formed wherein earthly life is declared 'lesser', however slight this declaration may be, still separates the human from an intrinsic part of their being. That is, it still prevents each one of us from becoming *human* in the fullest possible sense (Arendt, 1998). It would seem, then, that the

resolution lies in abolishing the hierarchy of value between being human and being of the earth without theoretically annihilating the irreducible difference that lies between them.

For this reason, let us again turn to the thought of Luce Irigaray and, in particular, the way she conceptually infuses our earthliness into every facet of our humanness without letting one subsume the other. Through such explorations, I hope to show that Irigaray's philosophy offers a real possibility of reconciling the breach between earth and world within Arendt's thought without losing Arendt's essential message in the process: that we, as humans, act from a foundation of gratitude for the given, which begins with the earth itself (Arendt, 1998).

Irigaray's 'Nature'

For Irigaray, the irreducible difference that lies between our earthly existence and our human existence – or, in Irigaray's words, our *nature* and our *culture* – can initially if somewhat crudely be imagined as a passage through which the effortless flow and return of one into the other, the other into the one, is a never ending movement within every human being. And if there is no hierarchy of value between our nature and our culture evident here, it is because to be human is to be both at once. Both aspects of our being harmoniously co-exist within Irigaray's framework which is to say that, for Irigaray, we become human precisely when we *cultivate our nature*. Correspondingly, our human unfolding regresses whenever we attempt to disown our nature. A flourishing and fulfilling human culture is one that is at every moment in perfect sync with our natural rhythms (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

Within this view is Irigaray's implicit and explicit assertion that nature comes first. Indeed, it is nature which sets the conditions for our existence as human. From nature we are born, in nature we dwell [46] and through nature we are connected to the entire universe as a microcosmic part of the macrocosm. Namely, Irigaray understands that nature *precedes* humanity and, as such, she recognises that our earthly being-ness is the first mode of human existence from which all other modes spring (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

Consequently, though it is not often apparent to us, the thread of nature runs though even the most cultured of human traits and achievements, regardless of whether they have been

[46] For even the most urban of landscapes contain within them the four elements: air, fire, earth and water.

cultivated in alignment with nature or in denial of it. Try as we might we cannot outrun our starting point as natural beings. For example, the skyscraper – an epitome of our apparent triumph over nature in its lofty defiance of our earthbound status – must cater to the natural needs of its corporeal, sensate inhabitants before all else. In this way our connection to nature, our existence *as* nature, is surreptitiously revealed: the plumbing in such structures tells of our reliance on the element of water; the artificial heating and lighting and the strategically placed windows speak of our need for the sun, etc. (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

Equally telling is the phallic symbolism underlying the skyscraper. Forcefully erect and thrust forever skyward, this steely edifice is illustrative of the way our embodiedness, bestowed upon us *by nature*, is revealed through our every thought, word and action, regardless of how steeped in cultural fantasy these may be. And irrespective of the architect's intention, with each revelation we are to some degree confronted with the corporeal reality behind the fantasy. Yet, by way of the edicts of western culture, such knowledge of our true state is quickly supressed and/or subverted. In this way, a culture/infrastructure not wholly, if at all, accommodating of our bodily existence has been afforded exponential growth within a planet that cannot sustain such excess. As a result, we humans dwell within a self-made world that ensures each one's inner fragmentation, each one's inability to integrate the different aspects of her/his being (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

Interestingly and certainly ironically, the uber-masculine imagery from which the skyscraper is created – impenetrable, immoveable and invincible – is arguably the very thing that renders it most vulnerable. That is, *because* of its extreme exposure and elevation, it can more readily be reduced to rubble in an instant. Consequently, there is a message here – one which is reiterated time and again throughout Irigaray's writings – as to the hubris of any cultural construction – material and/or ideological – that seeks, at least in part, to defy the natural origins and conditions of human life. The skyscraper is, thus, emblematic of the culture from which it springs – a culture which has risen and continues to develop out of the fervent western desire to defy our natural origins: to undermine, master and suppress such origins until they are eclipsed with dangerous ideas of human omnipotence (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

Irigaray is only too aware of our precarious location in self-denial. Her body of work, but particularly her later writings, alerts us to the fact that we move about today in a false reality where we shield ourselves to the fact of our corporeal vulnerability to our ultimate detriment.

Irigaray sees the urgent need for us to accept our *limited* sphere of control in a universe infinitely greater and more powerful than ourselves. Such urgency is no less due to the increasingly irreparable damage being made to planetary life through our unsustainable and excessively polluting western lifestyle, than it is to the dearth of our spiritual lives as human beings (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

There is no real place for the growth of the human spirit within a culture that has been built in opposition to our natural needs – a culture which denigrates our Being at its most primary, natural level. In saying this I do not wish to deny or undermine the deeply meaningful spirituality experienced now, in our present world, by innumerable human beings the world over. However, with Irigaray, I maintain that the potential for human spiritual growth is greatly impeded in terms of its richness and capacity while it is forced to develop in a culture which does not recognise our natural origins. And, again with Irigaray, I maintain that the necessity for unimpeded human spiritual growth is indisputable if we are to become as humans in the fullest sense (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

nature and culture existing in harmony with one another

Where the perpetuation of a culture sans nature creates a blockage of the human spirit, we are knocked off balance in every other respect: i.e., physically, mentally and emotionally – but perhaps most importantly of all – relationally. We cannot relate to ourselves or one another in a culture which refuses to recognise our mark of the natural, i.e., our sexed, corporeal embodiment. It is this circumstance which reveals a discord both within us and without that is crying out for harmony. For Irigaray, to achieve such harmony we need to not just *see* our natural existence, nor just *accept* it, but *embrace* it. This is a view which veers sharply from Arendt's gratitude for the given whilst keeping it at bay. And as we have seen, embracement, for Irigaray, begins with honouring the fact of our sexuate difference wherein each sex is neither more nor less cultural, more nor less natural than the other (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

We are all, irrespective of sex, at once divine and corporeal, spiritual and physical, cultural and natural. Contrary to western logic there is, Irigaray shows us, no abyss that lies between these different modes of human existence, eternally separating them. Indeed, for Irigaray, it is not only possible to repair the breach in order to create harmony between the culture/nature

dialectic, it is absolutely necessary. So while we can thus far see that Irigaray would agree with Arendt that earth and world – i.e., nature and culture – are two fundamental aspects of our existence as human, she would disagree that the earth or nature must be kept both metaphorically and literally at bay in order for us to develop a world or culture necessary for our humanness to emerge and flourish (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1992).

In the discussion that follows, we shall thus consider the primary factors that have enabled us to make this conceptual division in the west; what this means for men and women respectively, and, lastly, *how* we might reconcile this division and, most importantly, *why* we ought to.

In essence, Irigaray makes clear that the harm stems from the west's dominant interpretation of nature. Within the current western anthropocentric (andropocentric) framework, everything that has been categorised as nature is unproblematically objectified. Thus nature in its myriad of modes is reduced to mere object-matter, utterly devoid of spirit, of a *being*-ness which carries with it the ability to become. Within this perspective only Man thoroughly skirts such categorisation. In so doing Man is conceptually cleansed of any kind of natural existence – he is thus purely cultural, imbued with spirit, with a *being*-ness that grants him the exclusive right to become, to transcend from and in contrast to all that he is not: firstly, a being of and from nature and secondly, one of at least two kinds of human beings (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1996; 1992).

Nature is, thus, *kept at bay* for the sake of Man's purity – his exclusive claim to humanness. And at this point in our explorations we are problematically returned to Arendt's thought in which the natural world must also be kept at a safe distance in order to foster our humanness. For, while Arendt eschews the spurious notion of Man and replaces it with the reality that we as human beings are not just one kind but an infinite many, she ultimately does not grant our human existence its ties with nature. Sequentially speaking, nature does come first in Arendt's perspective and is revered insofar as it gifts us a home within which we can *be* human. Yet, in Arendt's thought, nature leaves off where our humanness begins. As in mainstream western thought, Arendt supports a framework within which we, as humans, must pit ourselves against nature (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1996; 1992).

Hence my argument for drawing Irigarayan thought into an Arendtian outlook. For when we beings of nature pit ourselves against it, the inevitable results are varying kinds of paralysis

and destruction. That is, this logic buckles under the scrutiny of an Irigarayan lens. For this lens brings into focus the reality that we cannot adequately foster our humanness – we cannot set the stage for its unimpeded growth – without first understanding that it is rooted in a natural existence. When we try to cut ourselves off at the roots, so to speak, we do not flourish – we wilt (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 2002a; 1996; 1992).

being and willing

In further exploring Irigaray's understanding of nature, let us here turn to her idea that we need to 'let life in its natural forms *be* in order that it may endlessly *become'* – in order, that is, for we as sexuately different human beings to endlessly become. Namely, we need to better understand how the practice of *being* over *willing* is central to the intrinsic connection Irigaray traces between the natural world and human existence. As shall be made clearer, for Irigaray, to let life *be* and from this perfect our becoming as human, begins with the thankful acceptance of ourselves as essentially natural beings – beings who form a unique part of a universal landscape comprised of a dizzying array of other unique natural life-forms, elements and phenomena (Irigaray, 1991; 2002a; 2016).

Our first mode of being-ness – that is, our primary existence as natural beings – is *given* to us. For Irigaray, our fullest appreciation and nurturance of this gift requires us to let it unfold in ways which align with the specific contours of its essence, which is to say, its nature. Thus, when we attempt to forcefully remould or conceal such contours – when we *will* our natural contours to be otherwise – the unfolding of our being becomes disjointed and at odds with life itself (Irigaray, 1991; 2002a; 2016). In emphasising this point, Irigaray makes the following comment on western culture:

> All the cultural requirements, which aimed at overcoming, concealing, and forgetting nature proved to me to be more or less ingenious devices for masking and hiding our real identity and sparing us its cultivation, each on our own part and also between us. (Irigaray, 2016: 18)

So, while letting life *be* in order that it may most fully become by no means precludes us from a mutually transformative engagement and connection with the natural world which lies both within and beyond us, it does however require our utter refrainment from seizing and laying

absolute claim to nature in order to conceal its essence and, thus, bend it to Man's will so that it forms his 'other'. (Irigaray, 1991; 2002a; 2016).

To take a step back here: a culture opposed to nature is a rich breeding ground for meaninglessness and absurdity. Our present western existence is steeped in such nihilism. We are, to reiterate Irigaray's message, at an utter disconnect from ourselves, one another and our place in the greater universe. In forming this insight Irigaray gives credence to several celebrated male thinkers of the western philosophical cannon who have more or less reached the same conclusion: the way we generally conduct our lives in the west is underlain by an inauthenticity, a backwards-ness concerning our evolvement as human beings. We are headed in the wrong direction (Irigaray, 1991; 2002a; 2016).

However, unlike many iconic male thinkers of the west, Irigaray does not turn to "mastery" as the solution to a culture gone astray. Levinas' facing the other, Hegel's dialectical struggle, Heidegger's being-unto-death , Sartre's being-for-itself, etc, are all underlain, reveals Irigaray, by the call to "master" life as it is given to us in order to remedy our existential ills (Irigaray, 1996; 1999; 2004a). While the subtlety of some such appeals necessitate painstaking deconstruction to even be rendered visible, there is no such appeal quite as blatant as that found in the thought of Nietzsche. While Irigaray stands firm with Neitzsche in his recognition and denigration of the nihilism devouring the west, she strongly opposes his solution in the form of the Ubermench – the super man – who attains his status precisely by *not* letting life be so that it may become what it is, so that we may become *who we are* while housing ourselves in an ever-expanding and deeply meaningful culture(s) (Irigaray, 1991). Indeed, though she is referring to man in the following quote, Irigaray could well be describing Nietzsche's Ubermench:

> Has he not, in fact exhausted the earth, prevailed by his cunning over the wild animal, over the birds and the fishes, subjected to his work the horse and the ox, invented the all-comprehending through speech, and also the government of cities and the victory over cosmic storms? Has he not dominated all, or almost all, by his cleverness, only to arrive at nothing? And, surveying from on high the world, his world, does he not find himself finally excluded from it? (Irigaray, 2002a: 2)

In gaining a deeper understanding of Irigaray's call to let life *be* in order to vest our lives with human meaning, it is therefore useful to delve further into her readings of Nietzsche. Unsurprisingly, the Nietzschean 'will to power' has no place in Irigaray's philosophy. For willing in this sense inevitably culminates in the excessive exertion of our force over nature for no other reason than to 'master' it, which inevitably leads to its diminishment and, ultimately, its destruction. For, arguably, the Nietzschean principle that God is dead clears the way for Man to take the title for himself and thereafter prove his divine might the only way he knows how – through the excessive subordination of 'not-Man', i.e., nature/women/non-hegemonic males/others-of-the-same, etc. (Irigaray, 1991).

Willing in the Nietzschean sense is the antithesis of life. It seeks death – it is a desire for power which aligns with the death-focus of mainstream western philosophy. It is an example of a masculine principle that has been wrenched well and truly from any connection with the feminine principle. Such wrenching creates a deeply oppressive asymmetry (Irigaray, 1991).

Therefore, the one who adequately (which is to say destructively) exerts his will over and above all else becomes Nietzsche's Ubermensch. His essence distorted through the guise of superhumanness, his becoming thwarted through the denial of his being, the Ubermensch pours all his energy into severing himself from reality – the reality of his limits as a human, as a sexed, corporeal being, as one sensible-transcendental creature among countless others, all irreducibly unique, infinitely precious and equally divine. That is, as one who exists not in opposition but *in relation* to all that is (Irigaray, 1991).

Thus the will to power is fuelled by the delusion that humanity *precedes* nature. Willing, then, is in perfect alignment with the western mentality that Man is the author of all existence, not least his own, and consequently in absolute control of every unfolding event or phenomenon. At the heart of this fantasy, which utterly denies human vulnerability, is an overwhelming fear of the chaos and uncertainty that is part and parcel of life and death. It is a fantasy which demonstrates a stubborn refusal of the fact that we are at all times subject to greater and unknown forces (Irigaray, 1991).

In light of the above, it could be said that 'letting be', or 'being', is the antithesis of 'willing to power'. However, we would be wise to steer clear of any logic which reduces 'being' to a passive – which is to say, agentless – mode of existence. On the contrary, being is a state of

agency. For, if exercising the will to power is an active undertaking – and indeed it is – so too, is the act of being. The difference is that one activity is oriented towards the destruction of life as it has been given to us whereas the other is oriented towards the cultivation of such life, which for us is no less than the richest evolution of our humanness (Irigaray, 1991).

In deepening our understanding of a non-passive letting be, it is worth considering Irigaray's concept of the breath which has been shaped by Eastern philosophies and about which she states:

> It is impossible to appropriate breath or air. But one can cultivate it, for oneself and for others. Teaching takes place then through compassion. And the same goes for engendering. It is a matter in both cases of giving-sharing one's breath with one who does not yet know the way of natural or spiritual life. (Irigaray, 2002a: 79)

Breathing then, for Irigaray, when cultivated and practiced consciously is a spiritual act which encourages the flourishing of relationality with other people and the earth beyond, and is entirely devoid of the Nietzschean will to power.

To further explain, in Irigaray's understanding of the world, being is not a vegetative state of existence wherein the only movement is a slow, steady and ultimately meaningless growth followed by decay. That is, being, for humans, is not akin to a Sartrean act of bad faith where one all but lapses into the state of 'being-in-itself', inanimate and devoid of consciousness. Rather, in Irigarayan thought, being is one and same with becoming. For being equals life and life is always fluid, always becoming. Consequently, to practice being over willing – to develop a culture *from* our nature rather than against it – is to engage with the universe, to understand oneself as *of* the universe and, therefore, connected to all that is. It is to open oneself up to one's greatest potential as an existential being and to become all that one can be (Irigaray, 1991).

The will we exert over nature is indicative our interpretation of it: as dead matter, at the service of Man, mundane, reviled and recalcitrant. Consequently, it is clear from this view that nature is something for Man to transcend. And women, among other groups of human individuals who fail to significantly measure up to Man, constitute part of this natural ground.

woman and nature (woman as nature)

The problems here are manifold. To begin with, all the natural aspects of the earth – plant and animal life; air, water, earth and fire – are denied any claims to sacredness. Rather, their intrinsic value, which arguably accords them unique kinds of being-ness (quite different to human kinds of being-ness), is obscured by their utilitarian values as they are defined within the western perspective. Put simply, nature is immanent matter, there only for the disposal of Man (Irigaray, 1991; 2002a; 2016).

Women, who in this perspective are steeped in nature, are also reduced to being only of utilitarian value. As such, they are obstructed from recognising their being and, thus, from the ability to become in accordance with it. Alternatively, Man is pure being. His becoming is given precedence and forms a culture which deems to speak for all. It is a partial becoming though because he too fails to see his being as part nature and, consequently, is prevented from becoming all that he can be (Irigaray, 1991; 1996; 2002a; 2016).

Nature in the west, then, serves as a constant reminder of our unwanted mortality, or undesired corporeality, our reliance upon it for life and our defencelessness against its powerful forces. Western thoughts of nature are, thus, accompanied by feelings of resentment. And seen in this light, there is little if any sacred status that can be ascribed to nature. This, for Irigaray, is the crux of the problem. We need, she asserts, to redefine nature so that its divinity can be seen, respected and embraced. So that human beings can lovingly accept their own natural existence and allow it to enhance their becoming as divinely corporeal, corporeally divine, sexuately specific beings (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2004b; 2016).

As we have discussed, to revile nature in western culture is equally to revile Woman, who through western discourse is theoretically conflated with all natural phenomena. To conceptually reduce nature to mundane, utilitarian matter is to do the same to Woman. And though for Man this guarantees his cultural ascription with supremacy, agency and authority – arguably not undesirable qualities – he, not just Woman, is utterly impoverished through this logic. Though he cannot see it due to the current derogatory western conceptions of nature, by severing his identity from his natural origins, Man depletes himself. He drastically reduces the quality, experience and size of his world (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2004b; 2016).

Consequently, the answer for Irigaray is for all, but particularly men, to regain sight of the inherent *divinity* in nature. She appeals for us to not just acknowledge our earthly origins but to regard them as divine. And with this shift in western thought, she believes it would be possible for us embrace the fact that we, women and men, are equally comprised of nature and, consequently, equally able and equally entitled to cultivate our respective natures to create human worlds specific to our sexed morphologies (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2004b; 2016).

It is of great importance to Irigaray that the divinisation of nature is central to halting and repairing the material harm thus far done to the planet by human hands. Yet of even greater importance to her, I would argue, is that it is central to undoing the crushing oppression of the present-day masculine symbolic order. It is indeed central to creating a cataclysmic shift in the order itself wherein environmental destruction and masculine domination are two sides of the same coin (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194). As Whitford comments:

> It is significant that Irigaray stresses that nature (the natural world) is not respected. This is not simply a version of ecofeminism (though it is that too), but part of her argument about the symbolic distribution, and the allocation of the 'lower functions' to women. (Whitford, 1991: 95)

To reconceive of nature as divine would be, among other things, to recognise the sacredness within human beings who are, first and foremost, *natural* beings, bestowed by nature with a sexuate specificity that is at least *two* in kind. And to honour the sacred requires us to safeguard its integrity – to receive it as it has been given to us – to cultivate it in harmony with what it *is*. Not neuter. Not same. Not hierarchically arranged beings worth either more or less worth by matters of degree. But sexuately diverse beings of unqualified and incalculable intrinsic worth (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194).

Moreover, to reconceive of nature as divine would necessarily aid in undoing the originary matricide (discussed on page 81) which resulted in the knowledge of and gratitude to the maternal body and its generative power laying buried within the foundations of the male symbolic order for the duration of western history. To explain, where nature is divinised, the maternal body – our first home, giver of breath, blood and life – is delivered from the current western perception of automated matter / mindless creatureliness and vested with a potent

spirituality. Through this new lens, the Mother becomes a divine being that bestows her divinity upon each child by virtue of its birth (Irigaray, 2008: 113-114; 2004a; 1996; 1995). The following quote of Emily A. Holmes helps illuminate this claim:

> The breath of the mother is shared rather than given away; the mother must retain her own breath in order to ensure her (and the child's) survival. Breathing is not restricted to the level of the natural, however. When cultivated, mature breathing leads to interiority and speech, both markers of subjectivity, and even further, to the possibility of a soul and divinity. (Holmes, 2013: 36)

To truly honour our being would be to allow the naturally given sexuate form of each kind of human being to provide the basis for each one's becoming. It is to allow for an unconstrained becoming where each culture that emerges exists in absolute harmony with the bodily contours – given to us by nature – from whence it arose. This is the way, Irigaray claims, to create the harmony presently lacking between culture and nature in the west. When this can occur, human becoming would be freed of its present stagnation and able to traverse new, yet-to-be-imagined horizons (Irigaray, 2004b: 145-194; 1996). As Whitford describes this aspect of Irigaray's thought,

> Irigaray locates sexual difference in nature but also puts it into the future, as a horizon of thought and action, as a transformation of the symbolic. (Whitford, 1991: 190)

We are at this point presented with the question as to how this might practically be achieved. How might nature be reconceived of as divine so that it forms part of dominant western discourse? How might men come to reclaim their natural origins and existence, and in so doing, free women to develop a culture specific to their morphology? There are of course no easy answers but, in one of her most recent offerings, *Through Vegetal Being*, Irigaray raises the importance of physically situating ourselves in the natural world. Of being close enough to it to undistractedly contemplate our relation to it, to allow ourselves to be in communion with it. Irigaray implies that to relate within nature – to acknowledge the natural aspects of our being and the natural world which exists beyond us – is humanising in the truest sense (Irigaray, 2016; 2004b: 145-194).

In describing her disillusionment following the publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray demonstrates how she turned to the most fundamental elements of the natural world in order to recover her being, which is to say her humanness:

> And I first had to struggle for my survival! It was not a small matter and, once more, the macrocosm welcomed me to save the microcosm that I was. It was the case with the sky and the sun that became my most constant company, with the vegetal world that shared the air with me and showed me the endurance of life, and also with some animals, more often the wild than the domesticated ones… (Irigaray, 2016: 15-16)

In recounting this episode of her life, we see that Irigaray had to struggle to find her way back to being and, hence, to becoming. Her first step on this path was no mere 'lapse into nature'– it was an agential, life-affirming and humanising experience. In the wake of devastation, she rejected the path of least resistance – i.e., 'dying of dereliction and solitude or vanishing into a mediatic representation' (Irigaray, 2016: 16) – in favour of actively opening her being up to the sun, the air, plant and animal life. In doing this she was able to recover her sense of *belonging* in the universe first and foremost as a being of and from nature (Irigaray, 2016).

The will Irigaray exercised in making this journey was not one of power but one of understanding. In the face of confusion, she willed to understand herself and her place in life at the most fundamental level. Only through such understanding was she able to realign with her being as it had been *given* to her and, from there, continue her journey of an authentic becoming (Irigaray, 2016). As she says,

> Being sent to the natural world in this way has allowed me to survive or, better, rediscover what life itself is. (Irigaray, 2016: 15)

It is vital that we comprehend what life *is*, without letting preconceived ideas and fears skew our perception. This is so that we may reach the closest understanding of our own being-ness, of how we each fit in the universe and how we may personally and collectively evolve in ways which are mutually humanising and life-enhancing (both being two sides of the same coin). And what life *is* for human beings, at its very foundations, is a *sexed* corporeal existence. Female, male or differently classified, we are *at least two kinds* of sensory beings. Each sex, of necessity, navigates the world differently. Thus one's most authentic and fulfilling becoming

rests on one's deep awareness and acceptance of the sexuate specificity that infuses their particular being (Irigaray, 2016).

When such deep awareness and acceptance takes place, it becomes all the more apparent that western culture has veered far from the truths of our multiple beings, especially for women. Irigaray's personal recovery through her reconnection with the most primary natural elements further clarified for her the dire need for women in particular to understand their being-ness (Irigaray, 1996; 2016). Which is to say, the need for women to gain a phenomenological understanding of their specific way of being – one which necessarily raises certain questions about the path many women have and still are bravely and tirelessly forging for their sex in a culture which, despite their repeated efforts, continues to exclude them:

> What did not suit me either was staying as a woman in a culture that was not appropriate for me, that is, agreeing with the fact that women's liberation could stop at a mere biological level. In fact, this would have amounted to perpetuating the status traditionally assigned to women, with the additional permission of going outside the family house so long as they submitted to a culture in the masculine that deprived them of the cultural values they need for constituting a subjectivity of their own, or, in other words, for existing as women. (Irigaray, 2016: 18)

To reconnect with the natural world is to etch out the beginnings of a subjectivity in alignment with one's sex and in harmony with the other sex(es) (Irigaray, 2016).

It may seem paradoxical to turn to nature in its absoluteness – i.e., to surround oneself to the limit of one's senses with nothing more than earth, sky, air, water, sun, vegetal life, non-human, non-domesticated animal life, etc. – in order to become human. Indeed, such a notion is utterly absurd when viewed purely through the dominant western perspective. It is thus worth our while to reflect on this move of Irigaray's more deeply by looking at her personal transformation in nature, the significance she places on the breath, and the resonances she draws between her experience and the ancient mythical figure of Antigone (Irigaray, 2016; 2013).

> "I left the city for the woods or the mountains as often as I could… When I absolutely had to stay in Paris I spent a part of the day in a park." (Irigaray, 2016: 21)

Condemned to a sort of exile by her onetime friends and colleagues, Irigaray sought her refuge in natural surroundings almost totally alone. That is, wherever she could, she situated herself within nature devoid of human company, outside the boundaries of cultural expectations and without the shelter of familiar cultural institutions. Yet she entered into the natural world as a cultural being. She carried with her the weight of a culture which had been conferred upon her, chafed her raw and had now explicitly rejected her. At this point, she had likely lost sight of *who* she was in a human context – that is, in relation to others. Her estimation of human worth was no longer confirmed by other humans, and the widely-held perception of what constitutes humanness was at odds with her own experiences in any event (Irigaray, 2016).

At her lowest ebb and suffocating under the deadweight of western culture, it was *life itself* that Irigaray sought out in nature. She needed to connect to life in its most given forms to revive the living energy within her which had been dulled by the oppression of western demand and convention. So, with minimal cultural distraction in nature, Irigaray was able to contemplate her existence as a living being in communion with life forms vastly different from herself yet, like her, rooted in a natural belonging. That is to say, despite the weight of western culture she carried within her, in nature she was able to reconnect with her own naturalness – a being first and foremost of and from nature. Her bodily contours and sexuate specificity were *given* to her, not socially constructed. Thus, she rediscovered the foundation of her being as natural, forever transcendent of any cultural attempts to re-author it into something it is not (Irigaray, 2016).

By way of her contemplations among the vegetal world, Irigaray became acutely aware of the special kind of differentiation it presented. Namely, a non-hierarchical differentiation where each plant "remains faithful to its own origin, growth and blossoming and is not standardized through its submission to one unique world that knows only quantitative differences." (Irigaray, 2013: 131). From this heightened awareness, Irigaray was able to see most clearly that the differentiation which marks human life is *sexuate* in nature. "The human species includes within itself its differentiation, its difference, because it is formed by two." (Irigaray, 2013:131).

Yet, as we have seen, human differentiation is concealed by our present culture of 'the same'. Thus, Irigaray shows how *desire*, which has its birthplace in difference, is unable to properly develop and, hence, unable to fully contribute to our human becoming. To pause here for a moment: desire, for Irigaray, is a peculiarly human phenomenon, and absolutely necessary in

creating culture(s) in harmony with our natural, sexuate belonging – of becoming all that we can be as women, men or another kind of being yet to be perceived in western culture (Irigaray, 2002a; 2016).

> In desire we look for *something more* of life; we hope for a supplement of life from the other. Already, desire itself awakens us to a life generally asleep in us. To desire really represents an awakening. (Irigaray, 2002a: 82)

Without acknowledging our irreducible sexuate difference, the fecund possibilities contained within desire lie beyond our reach. What might have been desire is thus reduced, within our culture of sameness, to proprietary intentions with respect to the other (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2013).

> "We want to possess the other as an object instead of approaching the other in order to share with him or her the energy of desire, between desiring and desirable subjects." (Irigaray, 2013: 83)

The complexity of human desire is such because it is in part spiritual. Yet our desire goes untended, our spiritual cultivation left wanting, because present-day western culture halts desire at the level of heterosexual attraction – an instinctual drive that not only contains within it the tendency to consume or be consumed by the other, but also the implicit demand to reproduce the species so that we never surpass an existence of one + one + one: quantitatively plural yet qualitatively identical. Thus, what could emerge as desire borne out of an acknowledged irreducible difference is kept at its basest level, its energies dulled and channelled in the service of the male lineage and the family unit of which the father is unquestionably the head (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2013).

By clarifying such insights whilst in nature, Irigaray saw that it was only *through* nature that we are afforded the possibility of releasing our living energy from the binds of western convention so that it may regenerate in ways conducive to our human becoming (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2016).

> We are not able to carry out the passage to a new human being without returning to our natural belonging, recovering the living energy it

> provides us with and learning how to use it another way. (Irigaray, 2016: 77)

In learning to use our energy another way, Irigaray suggests that one of the first gestures we can make is to simply acknowledge our debt to nature. Irigaray tells of how, situated within and focussed on the elemental and vegetal worlds, she became keenly aware of the ways such worlds *mother* her. It is with abundant gratitude that Irigaray acknowledges that nature provides her with all the sustenance she needs to simply live. In this light of gratitude, the death shroud of western culture becomes ever more perceptible. And it appears that until we can at least acknowledge our debt to nature, our living energy will be increasingly exposed to ideology and practices which seek to surmount nature – through the grossly counterintuitive western quest to shed our individual bodies and our confines to planet Earth. In short, regardless of any conscious intention, western culture seeks death (Irigaray, 1996; 2002a; 2016).

To reinforce Irigaray's core message at this point in our discussion: while our natural belonging remains firmly trussed and cloaked, silenced and buried, there is no space for human spiritual growth. It is little wonder, therefore, that so many in the west have endured only by virtue of the Judeo-Christian promise that unmitigated spiritual fulfilment comes after death – *comes with death*. In transforming human culture from one that is fixated with death to at least two that are oriented towards life, Irigaray considers the act of 'letting be' a crucial step along that path. And for this she holds up the vegetal world as our first and most fundamental teacher (Irigaray, 2016). She notes:

> "…I was contemplating the forms that a tree adopted, how it was able to change while remaining itself, a change in which it did not risk losing itself in devices because it amounts to the appearance of a living being. And I wondered why we as humans have ignored such an aptitude and thus resort to constructed forms to become acculturated. Why do we not keep alive and develop our own energy so that we may let our natural belonging flower?" (Irigaray, 2016:24)

Hence we are brought back to the idea of 'letting be in order to become'. Letting be, as previously mentioned, is not a passive existence but a truly agential one where much effort is poured into gestures that relate to our being(s) as it is / they are given to us through nature. Though such gestures, our being(s) can expand in harmony with our natural belonging. In travelling this line of thought, Irigaray places much focus on the air we breathe, which connects

us to every other breathing being with whom we share the air, as well as every other vegetal life form as providers of the oxygen we breathe in and beneficiaries of the carbon dioxide we breathe out (Irigaray, 2016).

"Breathing is the first and last gesture with regards to life…" (Irigaray, 2016: 21). It is at once corporeal and ethereal, bodily and spiritual. Attuning ourselves to the breath reminds us that we, as humans, are at once body *and* soul, nature *and* culture, there is no divide between the two despite western logic to the contrary. Through the breath, we are able to perceive ourselves holistically, and cultivate our spirit so that it honours life (Irigaray, 2016).

> If air is crucial for life, it is also essential as a fluid to ensure the cohesion of a physical and even a spiritual whole, be it individual or collective… Neglecting the necessity and potential of our breathing, our tradition has rendered our subjectivity both weak and rigid because it is frightened of any change. As it has received its contours from an outside world more than from its own life, it does not know how to deal with its presumed self. (Irigaray, 2016: 24)

Attuning oneself to the breath allows us to venture beyond a culture of 'the same', to realise *without fear* our interconnectedness with all that is, and to create a culture that stems from our natural contours which, in light of the breath, are exhumed from their interment in western constructs. When we focus on the breath, we are brought back to the bare bones reality of our existence. The western re-inscription of our natural contours falls away, allowing us to connect with our being outside of foreign perspectives and thus affording us the opportunity to re-create a culture that flows in harmony with who we are – body, spirit and one of at least two kinds of human being (Irigaray, 2016).

In meditating on her use of her breath to recover her life, Irigaray is drawn to Sophocles' *Antigone*: the story of a woman who in defiance of King Creon's arbitrary rules, attempts to bury her dead brother – a rite which equally encompasses the gravity of both body and soul without drawing a dividing line between the two. Antigone's defiance of Creon's dictates leads to her entombment and consequently her deprivation of air and untimely death (Irigaray, 2016).

Irigaray strongly identifies with the figure of Antigone as one who chose to reject the perversity of a manmade culture – one irreverent to life and particularly to the mother's bloodline (for her

dead brother, not being the eldest son, is thus tied to the mother) – in favour of fulfilling the requirements of the cosmic order which, as an order that transcends man's control, was relegated to the feminine (Irigaray, 2013). In describing the parallels, Irigaray says

> I have been, like Antigone herself, criticized for disturbing the established order in the name of personal passions. I would like to make clear that I spoke and acted in the name of an order repressed in our tradition, an order that it is necessary to consider again with the becoming and accomplishment of humanity in mind. To come back to Antigone, she in no way wills the perturbation of the order of the city, but she has to obey a higher order, unwritten laws, which the new order, embodied by Creon, intended to abolish. (Irigaray, 2013: 118)

Yet unlike Antigone,[47] Irigaray was ejected into nature – into air – wherein she was able to recover her humanity and her spirit firstly by respecting the breath of life which air affords us. In consciously attuning herself to her breath, Irigaray was able to form a passage between her body and her spirit without cutting off the former to access the latter. Thus her spiritual growth was one rooted in her natural belonging, her sexuate specificity. In making this journey she integrated within herself those aspects which western culture seeks to sever (Irigaray, 2013).

Being faithful to the earth and becoming human

Accordingly, if we are to revisit Arendt at this point, it is now clear that her appeal for humanity to be grateful for the givenness of earthly existence cannot be carried out to its full extent whilst it coexists with her equal appeal to put ourselves at a remove from such existence in order to accomplish our human being. By considering Arendt's appeal through an Irigarayan lens, her entreaty that we show due appreciation to Mother Nature is indeed amplified. Yet, the Irigarayan lens also reveals that we cannot achieve such Arendtian gratitude whilst delimiting our human boundaries at the exclusion of our natural origins. This is a mistake of western thought. We can neither fully nor richly accomplish being human whilst we remain fragmented.

[47] Antigone's ultimate entombment in an airless and barren cell which leads to her death, when perceived through an Irigarayan lens, reinforces the links Irigaray makes between nature, breath and the divine. As Emily A. Holmes states:

> …breathing as a passage between nature and culture is importantly also a spiritual practice. Through cultivating the breath, she writes, 'we transform our vital respiration into spiritual breath. Nature becomes spirit while remaining nature' … (Holmes, 2013: 38)

We need first to become whole – natural and spiritual beings, both at once – before we can become human (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2016).

At this point we might question whether Irigaray's philosophy renders Arendt's obsolete. For does not Irigaray, in part, make the same appeal as Arendt to respect the earth of which we are undeniably a part? What is the need of Arendt's thought in our attempts to reimagine human being in the west so that each person's unqualified intrinsic worth is honoured and cultivated? I would firstly argue that every voice is unique and one woman's words will always bring something into the world that no other person can. Arendt's voice is absolutely necessary as one firmly situated in the western tradition, yet rejecting of the west's eschewal of the natural world. It is striking to listen to the voice of a woman who, in the thick of tradition, goes sharply against it in favour of reality.

Arendt's voice, more than Irigaray's I would argue, *awakens* us to the very absurdity of the west's perspective of Nature. From such an awakening, Irigaray is able to radicalise Arendt's direction of thought. She takes it where Arendt, at her point of thinking and writing in the mid-20th century, could not. Irigaray keeps the integrity of Arendt's message – to be faithful to the earth – intact. Yet Arendt does not continue from that point to show how there are in fact no barriers between being faithful to the earth and becoming human – the two are inextricably intertwined and must be recognised as such in order for us to develop a culture in keeping with our reality as bodily, spiritual, sexuately specific and utterly unique human individuals – each and every one of us.

Chapter 6 – World / Culture Ethics

My intention in this chapter is to explore the writings pertaining to human culture within the respective philosophies of Arendt and Irigaray in order to show that we are urgently in need of a culture wherein our ontological status as sexuately different, plural beings is made visible and given space to grow. Culture, as it is discussed throughout this chapter, shall seem to resonate at times with the traditional western definitions that juxtapose it against the concept of nature – for culture *is* something that we create in response to our existence as specifically *human* beings and, as such, stretches our horizons far beyond our immediate experiences as species beings. However, what will be most apparent in the following discussions is that the definitive character of culture is the *meaning* it bestows. That is, it is the symbolic weight of any human created artefact, be it material or ideological, that renders it cultural, thus enabling it to both expand and fortify the borders of world whilst creating a sense of order within them. Culture injects our lives with meaning and orients us as humans in a human world. Without it, we cannot express or experience a fully human existence.

Through the following explorations it will be shown that, though our capacity to create cultural worlds is limited only by the human imagination, such creation must stay grounded in reality lest our relational links with one another and the world be severed through oppression, a scenario which aptly describes our current situation. I will first look at Arendt's 'World', her term for the cultural realm that we create as human beings. I shall further consider how the world for Arendt is divided into public and private domains – realms which need to stay demarcated lest we lose the cultural significance of our world and, with it, sight of our human uniqueness. We shall also delve more deeply into Arendt's temporal foundations and how the distinct temporalities that co-exist within world and earth need to remain distinct from one another and unbroken within themselves if our cultural creations are to endure, strengthen the world and infuse our lives with human meaning where each person is recognised and treasured as an utterly inimitable and wholly irreplaceable being.

I shall then turn to Irigaray's writings on culture and, in particular, the absolute necessity that it be shaped in response to our specific morphological contours, which are always at least *two* in kind. Thus our natural foundations provide the basis of our culture and where this is denied, as it is today in the west, the cultural meanings which result ironically place us at a distance

from our humanness. In looking at how this has manifested in the west I shall lend special consideration to Irigaray's thoughts on ownership and how it characterises contemporary life at the expense of our relationality. I shall also focus on how women, in a phallocentric culture which privileges ownership, are particularly vulnerable to being confused as 'goods' for exchange on the market and valued in terms of their status as virgin, mother or whore. In concluding, I will argue that for the sake of a fully human, rich and ethical existence, conscious effort needs to be put into creating cultural world(s) wherein Arendtian plurality and Irigarayan sexuate difference comprise its cornerstones.

Arendt's World

> No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings. (Arendt, 1998: 22)

In the previous chapter, I problematized Arendt's separation of earth and world in which she positions each concept in precarious opposition to the other. In challenging this aspect of Arendt's philosophy, we discovered that to be human, it is of great advantage to understand that the human world (or, as Irigaray terms it, culture) grows out of the given earth (for Irigaray, nature). That is, it is beneficial to our becoming to realise that there is a necessary and fluid continuity from earth to world which must be acknowledged and fostered lest we, most paradoxically, create an inhuman culture. Though such a realisation is extremely significant, it does not undermine Arendt's profound insight into what it means to be human. As evidenced in her above quote, Arendt understands that to be human, and not merely a species-being, we must at some point come out of the wilderness to be with other humans in a human-crafted domain (Arendt, 1998: 22-78). And, as we shall see, this remains true even after we have removed the Arendtian wall between earth and world from our philosophical view.

To refresh what we learnt in Chapter 2, the world to which Arendt is referring above is the distinctly human-built realm of material and ideological structures. It is a realm which is created through collective human effort against the backdrop of and in direct distinction to our earthly habitat. As such, the world prevents our existence from being limited to mere earthly creatureliness. That is, we transcend our homo sapient boundaries upon entering the not-solely-

natural, human-made world. Thus, it is due to the existence of world that we are no longer simply a particular animal species among numerous other animal species. We are something more – human beings (Arendt, 1998: 7-78).

The world, therefore, is laden with meaning peculiar to the human experience. Its every component carries a symbolic significance which specifically attests to what it is to be human. We understand our humanity through interpreting worldly symbolism. At the same time we create our humanity by way of such interpretations. Consequently, as will become clear in the following discussions, the world is an astoundingly complex, ever-changing *shared* space – one's being human can never take place in isolation. What shall also become clear in what follows is that the world is eternally open to growth and enrichment yet equally vulnerable to abuse and neglect. And it is this latter prospect which Arendt fears will spell the demise of the human dimension. This very real fear is what drives her philosophy – her appeal to ceaselessly renew and repair the world we share in common (Arendt, 1998: 7-78).

One of Arendt's primary concerns is that the character of the world, as it stands in the west, has been misunderstood for centuries. Consequently, over time the boundaries of the world have been stretched to breaking by dominant western ideologies and their concomitant material practices. Both have effectively drawn non-worldly aspects into the world's interior, inevitably bringing about the disintegration of the latter. Such merging of the non-worldly with the worldly threatens our very human-ness in a way that has the potential to be absolutely catastrophic. For, it does not merely put us at risk of being reduced to a species-being. Rather, it has the capacity to expose us to a meaninglessness so all-encompassing that not even the survival of the homo sapient species would remain as the purpose for our existence. Without the world we are in danger of submersion into a disorder so infinite and senseless that nothing and no one is sacred (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1976: 460-479).

For these reasons, Arendt urgently seeks to re-establish an understanding of the world that will safeguard our human-ness, which for Arendt has its key quality in the fact that each person is irreducible to any other – each one's utter uniqueness adds something necessary to the world that cannot be duplicated by anyone else. There is no question of each one's immeasurable human worth in Arendt's philosophy (Arendt, 1998: 8).

action as proper to the public realm

The world is the hub of action. However, not all kinds of action are afforded a place in the world. Only political action – i.e., public words and deeds – is proper to the world. Activities which take place in solitude, such as the composition of a novel, or activities which lack political character, such as a trip to the supermarket, are not world-making acts. Should the novel be published and reach a relatively extensive audience, only then it does it become political in nature and proper to the world. The act of grocery shopping, however, because it corresponds to the demands of biological survival is, for Arendt, irrevocably un-political. For, even though it takes place in the public realm, acquiring food is ultimately an act proper to our private, non-political existence – our life within the home wherein we are sheltered from the public (Arendt, 1998: 22-78).

Thus it is becoming apparent at this point in our discussions that the human realm, the public realm, the political realm and the world are relatively interchangeable concepts in Arendt's philosophy.[48] In contrast, the private realm being the location of love, intimacy, interpersonal relationships, maintenance of bodily needs, etc. is, for Arendt, decisively anti-political. The private realm is no less essential to a full and rich life than the public realm, but it is not there that our humanness is primarily located or cultivated. So, for the sake of our fullest development as human beings, each one unique, and, equally, for the protection of the most sacred aspects of our lives, including love and family, Arendt insists that the private and public realms must be kept distinct from one another. When the divisions between public and private are blurred, each one's human uniqueness becomes obscured, our intimate relations wither from exposure, and, consequently, we start to regard each other as superfluous, interchangeable and expendable. Hence the absolute need of Arendt to keep the political and personal spheres separate (Arendt, 1998: 22-78).

[48] The conceptual interchangeability of the public realm with the political realm in Arendt's thought is indicative of her view that an authentic political order is established from the ground up as opposed to the top down. As George Kateb states, '…for Arendt the dignity of politics has nothing to do with using government as a weapon or instrument of social reform or even adaption to social change' (Kateb, 2007: 131).

> Although the distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and finally, of shame and honor, it is by no means true that only the necessary, the futile, and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm. The most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all. (Arendt, 1998: 73)

It is a common feminist argument that Arendt's refusal to grant that the personal is political renders her philosophy oppressive to women [49] (Honig, 1995; Pitkin, 1981; Rich, 1979). And while this is a problematic element for the Arendtian feminist, it does not create the unresolvable impasse that is so often perceived. It is important to remember Arendt's primary concern behind her proposition that the personal is not political. Namely, Arendt's experience is that oppression *results* when personal and political dividing lines are muddied (Arendt, 1976: 460-479). So while I unreservedly believe that the oppression of women in the private domain must be made public in order to be abolished, I similarly agree with Arendt that there is a need to retain clear-cut boundaries between the two realms (Arendt, 1998: 22-78). Ultimately, I do not see these two views to be wholly contradictory, a position which will become clearer as we continue to unravel Arendt's understanding of both the public and the private in the context of her concept of 'world'.

To reiterate one of the main themes of this thesis: for Arendt, no person is ever superfluous. Every life is of value. Each person is a unique entity and as such, infinitely precious, utterly irreplaceable and instilled with the potential to enrich our shared world in a way that cannot be replicated by any other (Arendt, 1998: 7-78). Yet, without the public realm – synonymous for Arendt with our political space of appearance: our human world – we are unable to see, let alone appreciate, the intrinsic worth and distinct difference of each individual being. Namely, the absence of a clearly demarcated public realm *deprives* us of the unique perspectives of others and vice versa. In such a situation, all others are seen as potentially replaceable, which is to say superfluous, and the idea becomes rife that they are more often obstacles to the objectives of a particular perspective, one that is unable to be sufficiently critiqued for want of

[49] This particular view of Arendt can be broadly summed up in Adrienne Rich's description of her as a 'female mind nourished on male ideology' (Rich, 1979: 212).

a public platform and, therefore, deemed "the Truth". In this instance, interactions lose all traces of humanity – people as obstacles are either tyrannised into submission or simply eradicated by those with the greatest means of brute-force at their disposal (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1976: 460-479).

It should be coming clearer to us then that the public realm as Arendt defines it is where the qualitative plurality of human beings is recognised and able to be harnessed for the good of the world. Without it, our uniqueness and worth go unregarded beyond the four walls of our private domain. Correspondingly, where there is a firmly entrenched public space, we are able to perpetually develop who we uniquely are without the restraints of oppression and thus grow, evolve and flourish with others through the sharing of multiple and diverse viewpoints. To imagine the Arendtian public realm is to visualise a sphere where a constant exchange of ideas take place, all such ideas consisting of words and deeds that humanise the speaker/actor(s) whilst expanding the perspective and deepening the understanding of the spectator(s) – actor and spectator being, in the spirit of exchange, continuously interchanging roles (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247; 1976: 460-479).

In Arendt's terminology such publically expressed words and deeds equate to "action". And a solid understanding of how Arendtian action fits in with her philosophy is vital to seeing why Arendt's firm location of humanity in the public sphere does not automatically result in the free reign of women's oppression in the private sphere. On the contrary, Arendt's public/private divide, when properly understood, can be seen as working to eliminate women's oppression. To further explain, for Arendt action is a specifically human trait and one which can only come to fruition in the public realm (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247; 1976: 460-479).

> Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of (the hu)man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others. (Arendt, 1998: 22-23)

Provided it is not intentionally used to suppress human diversity and destroy the public realm, action, as opposed to mere activity, is necessarily collective and, as such, conducive to inclusivity. The distinction Arendt makes between *activity*, such as the trip to the supermarket

considered above, and *action* is marked. Activity is generally proper to the private realm. It may take place in the presence of family, friends or select circles. Often it takes place in isolation. It is not reliant on a public collective and, rather, is directed towards the individual's needs and wants. It pertains, among other things, to earning a living, keeping one's health, tending to relationships, the experience of peace or reflection in solitude, etc. (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247; 1976: 460-479).

Thus to reiterate, activity as opposed to action pertains to the personal aspects of life, including its basic maintenance. As such, activity and the private domain to which it is most suited is often closely aligned with Arendt's concept of earth. For each of these concepts – activity, the private realm and the earth – involve elements of necessity and cyclic repetition. Arendtian action on the other hand, public by definition and contingent by nature, relates only to the world (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247). However, only an ungenerous reading of Arendt's thought could conclude that the private realm, activity's proper domain, is merely a necessary evil in Arendt's schema – a space where we can get the messy business of life out of the way, all the while being eager to return to our common world where we can be extensively seen, heard and leave our mark. Or in the words of Arendtian theorist and critic, Hannah Pitkin, where we can get back to the business of acting like "posturing little boys clamouring for attention" (Pitkin, 1981: 338).[50]

In response to such an interpretation, I would argue that a deeper reading of Arendt's work reveals her as placing an equal importance on the public and private realms, if not on earth and world. Further, taking the time to develop a more nuanced understanding of Arendt's thought helps illuminate her view of the private and public as far more complex than simply a realm of necessity juxtaposed with a giant stage upon which to exhibit our vainglory. [51]

[50] For a concise rebuttal of this kind of view put forth by Pitkin, see Jacques Taminiaux (2007) and Jeremy Waldron (2007).

[51] Arendt's desire for a public realm characterised by fruitful, intersubjective, communicative exchange – the very antithesis of empty bluster, showboating and theatrics – is, I think, crystallised in the following passage taken from a letter she wrote to Karl Jaspers in 1965:

> I've just come from a student protest meeting against our policy in Vietnam. I went with several colleagues. The whole thing was extremely reasonable and unfanatical. So crowded that one could hardly get through. No one shrieked; no

the underestimated significance of 'the private' in Arendt's thought

To elaborate on Arendt's take on the private, she makes clear that this realm provides us with necessary refuge and respite from being both on and attendant to public display – i.e., to listening/observing and being heard/seen on a broader stage. The private realm is that treasured space where one can collect oneself and attend to their personal wants and needs, where they can develop their inner dialogues, by distancing themselves from political issues which far exceed the individual in terms of consequences. Without the enrichment a private life provides, we become fundamentally depleted in all other aspects of life. We lose the ability to cultivate our uniqueness and, thus, relate to ourselves or others in any meaningful way (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1993: 173-196).

> These four walls, within which people's private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive… Wherever [the life of a human being] is constantly exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security its vital quality is destroyed. In the public world, common to all, persons count, and so does work… but life *qua* life does not matter there. (Arendt, 1993: 186)

Indeed, life *qua* life matters very much to Arendt. In elucidating this assertion, she adds,

> Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness and, however strong its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs the security of darkness to grow at all. (Arendt, 1993: 186)

Thus, contrary to possible misinterpretations, the private realm is of intrinsic value to Arendt. It is, for her, not merely a realm necessary only in its ability to demarcate the beginnings and

---

> one gave a speech, and that in a mass meeting. Real discussion and information. Very impressive. (Arendt, 1992: 594)

ends of the public domain so revered by her. The private realm is, in Arendt's view, the very foundation of our common world. It is no less vital to our wellbeing than its public counterpart. So in gaining a deeper comprehension of Arendt's concept of world in contrast to her understanding of the earth, it is important to note that while the political/public domain and the world are often transposable notions in her philosophy, the private realm also has worldly aspects despite its close conceptual links with earthly life. And at this point we might recall the four walls of our private domain referred to in Arendt's aforementioned quote. For such walls are themselves worldly artefacts, fabricated by human hands and/or through human ingenuity, not merely against the earth, but against the world while, at the same time, for the world (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1993: 173-196).

So, though our common animality is tied to the earth, Arendt never implies that we shed our uniqueness every time we cross over the threshold into the private domain. She never intimates that we dehumanize ourselves whenever we become absorbed in non-political concerns. Rather the marked emphasis on the public aspect of the world in her philosophy is because its peril is greater, not because it surpasses the private in terms of value. In other words, Arendt is ever aware that the greatest threat to human existence lies not within our private realm but within our rapidly disintegrating public one. In her desire to draw our attention to the urgent need for world repair, she simply has not the time, space nor need in her writings to equally extol the virtues of the private realm – the realm wherein we live and love most fully but wherein *who* we uniquely are cannot be shared to an extent significant enough to touch the lives of those located beyond our private circles, and thus add to our world-in-common (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1993: 173-196).

I would argue then, that Arendt's insistence that we must keep our private lives out of the common world and vice versa is for the sake of both realms. And this is so even though her appeal is explicit mainly in its concern for the common world. We shall return to this point further on in this chapter when we consider the lived consequences of the postmodern breakdown that is still occurring between the private and public realms and how a clear separation of the two can work in support of rather than in hindrance to the vital work of the women's liberation movement in politicising women's oppression (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1993: 173-196).

Leaving the private realm aside for the moment, let us turn once again to Arendt's world-in-common: we have seen that Arendt is resoundingly clear throughout her body of work that we have an obligation to our world to regularly and actively occupy the public realm so that we may receive and consider the actions of others necessarily different from ourselves and, through our own words and deeds, potentially contribute something of ourselves to the common world for all to share in. The nature of the public realm then, is one which thrives on human diversity – which grows richer with each additional voice. Or, to word it another way, the very existence of the public realm – our shared world – utterly depends on an infinite multitude of distinct viewpoints. Accordingly, the notion of human superfluity is rendered incomprehensible in the Arendtian public realm wherein each person, because of who they uniquely are, not in spite of it, is deemed invaluable (Arendt, 1998: 175-247).

Ideally, the public space is a realm of many voices, never quite in unison, and sometimes quite drastically opposed. It is, to be certain, a place of ongoing disagreement, though never oppression – *ideally*. The nature of its inclusivity renders the public space, at least in its perfected form, entirely antithetical to the forcible imposition of one's will on another. It is a forum where each person, regardless of who they are, has both an equal right to be listened to and to listen. And I think at this point in our discussion, it is apparent that Arendt's vision of a strong and functional world-in-common is an ideal. But it would be misguided to dismiss Arendt's view as romantic optimism. For Arendt was no idealist. She was a staunch realist. Unlike any of the great western political thinkers who came before her, Arendt takes note of the fundamental human condition that each one of us is different – we each have a unique perspective and a will of our own which, by definition, is never in complete harmony with the perspective and will of another (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247).

Not only was Arendt utterly undesirous of a suppression of individual differences for the good of a rigid political order, she was thoroughly aware that any attempt to do so would be ultimately futile and cost many a human life in the process. It is through this realisation that she is able to discern a common pattern running through mainstream western political philosophy wherein, contrary to what might be expected from a political philosophy, human life is *not* respected by a political order that has been created in its service. Rather, throughout the western philosophical canon human life is commodified and of value only insofar as it is in service *to* the political order. In other words, such philosophy inverts the meaning of the

political by insidiously removing the very element which it purports to advocate – democracy (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247; 1976: 460-479).

To further explain the contrast between Arendt and other political thinkers: from Plato's Republic to Marx's stateless society, political action is largely reduced to the work and labour activities of its citizens. For in all such political models, certain roles involving work or labour are conferred upon each citizen in an effort to *make* a political realm that fits the particular vision of its author (Arendt, 1998: 175-247; 1976: 460-479; Canovan, 1998: iv-xx). However, as Canovan notes by drawing on Arendt's thought, the act of *making*, especially under someone else's directive, is not in itself a political action:

> Making – the activity (Arendt) calls work – is something a craftsman does by forcing raw material to confirm to his model. The raw material has no say in the process, and neither do human beings cast as raw material for an attempt to create a new society or make history. Talk of "Man" making his own history is misleading, for (as Arendt continually reminds us) there is no such person: "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" To conceive of politics as making is to ignore human plurality in theory and to coerce individuals in practice. (Canovan, 1998: xi-xii)

In agreement with Canovan's interpretation of Arendt's thought, Arendtian philosopher Dana Villa states:

> Arendt credits Plato with modelling action along the lines suggested by the fabrication process. By imagining the polity in the image of a fabricated object, Plato was able to plausibly assert that political wisdom had nothing to do with the exchange of opinion amongst plural equals but was, in fact, a form of expert knowledge, similar to that possessed by a sculptor or a physician. Hence, the moral "expert" should rule in the realm of human affairs, while those lacking such knowledge should simply obey. (Villa, 2007: 11)

In a similar vein, Arendtian critic and author, J. Peter Euben states

> For Arendt, a political community as opposed to the ersatz politics of a Platonic city or a liberal state requires the contentiousness of strong-willed individuals who also appreciate how the world they share makes their individualism possible. (Euben, 2007: 156)

For Arendt, the point is not to align the wills so mass conformism constitutes order. The point is to accept and embrace the plural aspect of being human. The political realm, ideally, should provide a platform wherein each one has the capacity to be heard and to listen in an atmosphere of compromise and respect and whereas the impetus for each one to act is at all times in the spirit of a world hospitable to plurality (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 175-247; 1976: 460-479).

And at this juncture, it is plain to see why criticisms of idealism, elitism, utopianism and hopeless impracticality have been levelled at Arendt's political philosophy, despite it being one of the only notable bodies of work to place the ineluctable fact of human plurality at its centre (Honig, 1995; Pitkin, 1981; Rich, 1979). For, as such criticisms imply, how can each and every one hope to have their voice heard and their uniqueness respected in such a densely populated and endemically unequal world? Why must vast bodies of people whose voices have been weakened through deprivation of food, safety, and/or place depend on being heard in such an arena before their vital needs are met? How can simply if not cordially 'agreeing to disagree' replace the xenophobic hatred and mass acts of violence that increasingly characterise human relations? (Honig, 1995; Pitkin, 1981; Rich, 1979).

While it is fair to say that Arendt's political vision is utterly alien to what we experience today, I think it is a mistake to dismiss it as fanciful. Arendt herself was only too aware that contemporary conditions are such that we have long since dispensed with the boundaries between public and private. And while this renders her hope for political life significantly more difficult to achieve, it equally makes it more necessary than ever. For without such boundaries, we are without the world – without the space that bestows upon us our humanity. Rather, we find ourselves located in a weird amalgamation of public and private where the distinct qualities of both merge to create what Arendt refers to as the social realm, and which we today experience in the west as mass society (Arendt, 1998: 22-78; 1993: 307-323).

In a sense, Arendt sees the modern social realm as the space where private concerns have been writ large causing political concerns to wither. Arendt asserts that economic matters, such as making a living and production and consumption, have extended beyond the confines of the private realm to become the very stuff of public life, resulting in the collapse of both (Arendt, 1998: 22-78).

> In our understanding, the dividing line is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but "national economy or "social economy"… all of which indicate a kind of "collective housekeeping" (Arendt, 1998: 28-29)

The key feature to this modern way of life wherein the social realm has taken over both the public and private is conformist behaviour. That is, the social realm orders our lives in such a way that our innate uniqueness is not only irrelevant to its efficient running, it is disruptive to it. Action, thus, is precluded from the social realm and as a consequence, our ability to recognise ourselves and each other as human is suffering from a lack of space where our humanity can appear, grow and be cultivated (Arendt, 1998: 22-78).

> It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. (Arendt 1998: 40)

Indeed, key to Arendt's notion of action is that it is *spontaneous*. Action itself often irrupts in an unpredictable fashion and always sets off a chain of events (i.e., a series of further actions) which cannot be foreseen nor, sometimes, even guessed at (Arendt, 1998: 236-247). To take an example which sticks in my memory due to its very momentousness: the Berlin Wall, when

it fell in 1989, was an astounding event borne out of spontaneous action. Though in hindsight, we can see that decades of oppression were leading to its inevitable collapse, the event itself was, at the time, both unprecedented and unpredictable. Its coming about was utterly dependent on the capacity for spontaneous human action. Namely, it was only through a collective of persons working together towards the same end – that is, disrupting the expected behavioural patterns imposed by the Soviet regime and, instead, doing the unexpected via spontaneous actions – that toppled the Berlin Wall.

In formulating her concept of action, Arendt understands that spontaneity lies at the heart of the plurality which is itself central to human existence. To explain: because each person is necessarily unique, we each think and act in ways that cannot be wholly predicted by others, let alone ourselves (for such is the "darkness of the human heart…the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow" (Arendt, 1998: 224)). Behind each of our acts is our own impetus – a driving force which reflects *who* we uniquely are. Genuine self-expression, then, always transcends any standard of behaviour or formula of prediction. Which is to say, in all our words and deeds, spontaneity is always a feature. Thus to stifle our capacity for spontaneity is no less dehumanising than the suppression of our plurality (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

Consequently, every time we act in the world – which is to say, in the public, political arena – we cannot help but bring something new and unforseen into the world, no matter how infinitesimal. And it is this – our inherent capacity for natality – which for Arendt comprises the very soul of political action and, as such, provides our best hope for world renewal (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men [and women] and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (Arendt, 1998: 247)

Thus each person, by virtue of being born, are themselves a force of natality – their mere presence in the world adding something new. One's words and deeds then, as unique offerings

from the individual speaker/actor, provide us the means to continue adding newness to our world-in-common, to renew the threadbare spaces of our most human of realms and lend it endless variety and colour (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

Arendt's thought then, is very much oriented in beginnings – beginnings from which unfold a sequence of happenings that cannot be precisely foretold, but that sometimes contain within them the possibility of a more inclusive world. Thus, there is a hope within Arendt's philosophy that is absent from the thought of many of her contemporaries who start with the fact of our ultimate mortality and in so doing arguably reduce the life which precedes it to a mere prelude to death (Arendt, 1998: 236-247, Canovan, 1998 vii-xx).

> In sharp contrast to Heidegger's stress on our mortality, Arendt argues that faith and hope in human affairs come from the fact that new people are continually coming into the world, each of them unique, each capable of new initiatives that may interrupt or divert the chains of events set in motion by previous actions. (Canovan, 1998: xvii)

Yet, alongside Arendt's hope for world renewal through action is her equal awareness that action, even where liberation is the intended goal, is, in all its unpredictability, just as capable of producing a more oppressive world. Namely, the natality which renders action "the one miracle-working faculty of man" (Arendt, 1998: 246) is also the very thing that renders it so volatile and so potentially dangerous. For to bring something new into the world does not always guarantee its enhancement. To further explain, because action is collective by definition, it is always initiated and thereafter carried on by a numerous variety of necessarily unique human beings. That is, once an action has been let loose into the world, it is exposed to the further actions of unknowable others and as such the way it unfolds can never be entirely predicted. The original actor's intent may be lost along the way and the ultimate consequence of her/his action may be very different to what she/he had set out to achieve (Arendt, 1998: 236-247; 1976: 460-479).

The unpredictability inherent to action is due to the fact of human plurality and to the natality that accompanies it. But, as discussed above, Arendt had no wish for a political order that safeguarded against contingency by supressing plurality. A world-in-common where no action

is permitted amounts, at least in one worst-case scenario, to a totalitarian regime: perhaps the most restrictive, stagnating and, thus, dehumanising of oppressive world orders. Thus, the alternative to action – the living death of oppression – is no alternative at all for Arendt who, despite full comprehension of action's inherent risk, still advocates it as the "miracle that saves the world" (Arendt, 1998: 247). (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

In countering action's possible harm, Arendt implicitly asks that we always act consciously and within the spirit of a world hospitable to plurality. Indeed, the underlying message repeated time and again in her work is that we recognise and accept the undeniable fact of plurality as central to being human. She steers us towards the path of acting in accordance with plurality firstly by simply helping us to be mindful of it – by helping us become aware of it as an indisputable and unalterable aspect of our reality – the aspect which contextualizes all other aspects (Arendt, 1998: 236-247). In her prologue to *The Human Condition* – the book which goes further than any other in explicating the intricate complexities of action – she sums it up thusly,

> What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. (Arendt, 1998: 5)

And this, to reiterate a previous point, is the very opposite of what the reigning political philosophies of the west arguably propose: i.e., that we surrender our decision making faculties,

and thus our capacity for action, to rigidly obey a set of rules formed in the necessarily limited perspective of the one or the few (Arendt, 1998: 1-6, 236-247).[52] [53]

When Arendt asks us to think what we are doing, then, she reveals her understanding that we are, as human beings, always 'doing' something. Whether it be the doings prescribed by and for a repressive regime, or whether it be radically opposed to authorised conduct. Even the most apathetically fuelled undertakings – i.e., simply not caring, refusing to take responsibility, declining to act – is a doing. And because we are, as forces of natality, inherently and eternally capable of bringing something new into the world, Arendt sees that even in the most oppressive circumstances, we never fully lose our capacity for action, stifled though it may become. That is, we never entirely lose the ability to transform our doings into something that constitutes action – something that can steer the course of events in a different direction. Thus, there is in most cases a glimmer of agency within even the most constrained individual, though this cannot be consciously accessed and ethically utilised until they *think* what they are doing (Arendt, 1998: 1-6, 236-247).

[52] The radicalness that Arendt's stance on thinking and morality holds within the western philosophical canon is illuminated by author Carol Brightman who, with the help of Arendtian scholar Jerome Kohn, states:

> Arendt, Kohn suggests, "actually believed that thinking conditions people to resist evildoing." This novel view sets her apart from contemporary moral theorists, as well as from her beloved Kant. It suggests why the philosopher J. Glenn Gray, speaking of The Life of the Mind shortly before his death in 1972, told Kohn that "this book is at least a hundred years ahead of its time." (Brightman, 1995: xxviii)

And, without contradicting the above statement, Arendt's friend and editor, Mary McCarthy, sees common ground between Arendt and Kant on this matter:

> I would have said that Eichmann was profoundly, egregiously stupid, and for me stupidity is not the same as having a low I.Q. Here I rather agree with Kant… that stupidity is caused, not by brain failure, but by a wicked heard. Insensitiveness, opacity, inability to make connections, often accompanied by low "animal" cunning. One cannot help feeling that this mental oblivion is *chosen*, by the heart or the moral will – an active preference, and that explains why one is so irritated by stupidity… (McCarthy, 1995: 296)

[53] In further support and explication of Arendt's appeal to us to *think* as a matter of ethics, author Richard J. Bernstein states:

> Even though thinking by itself is not sufficient for yielding practical wisdom, in times of crisis, thinking may liberate the faculty of judging by which we do discriminate what is right and wrong, good and evil. (Bernstein, 2007: 285)

Accordingly, for Arendt, this capacity – this agency – vests in us a responsibility to act, however and wherever we can, *for* the world-in-common (Arendt, 1998: 1-6, 236-247, Canovan, 1995: 130-141). As Canovan notes,

> Among the concerns of (Arendt's) time was the reminder that even in the most apparently hopeless circumstances individuals may always be able to do something, and therefore that they cannot hide from responsibility. (Canovan, 1995: 139)

While Arendt steadfastly maintains we have an onus to care for the earth, she is even more emphatic in her assertion that we are each accountable for the world we share with others. As such, action mindful of plurality is our first obligation as human beings – despite what comes of it. For, as we have discussed, mindful action desirous of fostering human diversity cannot guarantee that end-result. And Arendt knew this well. However, her ultimate faith in action is revealed when we see that Arendt's best solution to human events gone astray is further mindful action. And when considering the alternatives, it is difficult to disagree with Arendt that action is perhaps the only tool human beings have at their disposal to repair the rifts of our world-in-common (Arendt, 1998: 1-6, 236-247, Canovan, 1995: 130-141).

> …the remedy against irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but it is one of the potentialities of action itself. (Arendt, 1998: 237)

Here Arendt is referring to the specific actions of Promise and Forgiveness. She goes on to say,

> The two faculties belong together in so far as one of them, forgiving, serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose "sins" hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation and the other, binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, which the future is by definition, islands of security… (Arendt, 1998: 237)

temporal continuity

As a deeply temporal thinker, it is not surprising that Arendt firmly aligns world-restorative action with the past and future tenses respectively. For as we have seen, our world-in-common survives only through its temporal continuity. So when a harm committed against the world is great enough, a rupture in time occurs and continuity is severed. With each such harm, the world makes less and less sense. The worldly spaces which simultaneously relate and separate us, thus enabling us to reaffirm our humanness and expand our world, are thrown into disarray. Tossed about and utterly disoriented, we become estranged from the world, from each other and from ourselves. We become, in a sense, stuck in time – unable to move forward – and seriously hindered in our ability to create anew (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

And what has been done cannot be undone, of this Arendt was fully cognisant. But, in many cases, it can be forgiven. The wounds caused by a misdeed against the world so long as they are not too great in scale (a point to which we shall return), can be healed through acknowledgement, apology and forgiveness. Namely, where the one or ones responsible for the worldly misdeed acknowledge and accept responsibility for their wrongdoing and apologise to those affected and, in turn, where those affected accept the apology and grant forgiveness, the wound is then able to heal. And while the world may forever carry the scar tissue, worldly tears mend when acknowledgement, apology and forgiveness is extended. Through the collective human effort of forgiveness, time is thus able to flow, once again, in a continuous stream (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

And provided we remember and retell of the event, it does not disappear into the ether of the past, but rather forms part of our story. In this way the tale borne from the event is able to provide a forewarning with respect to our future actions, if not guarantee us against a reoccurrence. And this, for Arendt, is where promise holds so vital. For, though we cannot wholly control or predict what is yet to happen, we can make promises to each other that, when genuine, aid in preventing an action from descending into world destruction. Just as forgiveness tends to the wounds of the past, promise acts as our best indemnity against future harm. Thus forgiveness and promise are actions complementary to one another in their ability to assist the flow of temporal continuity, from the farthest reaches of our past to the outermost boundaries of our future (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

When we make promises to one another for the sake of the world, we make a commitment to undertake our future actions *mindfully* and in the spirit of human plurality. So while each person remains unique and therefore their actions never entirely predictable, where a collective of necessarily unique individuals promise one another to base their actions on a respect for human plurality, there is a lessened likelihood of events which result in a suppression of plurality and depletion of our world-in-common. In other words, our world is lent much-needed stability through the enactment of promise (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

And though there is a restriction of human freedom involved when we promise one another to act in a certain way, such restriction is of a totally different nature to the constraints of oppression which seek to replace human spontaneity with drone-like obedience. The restriction involved in promise, unlike that involved in, say, totalitarian rule, is not one where the promisor is required to quell her/his uniqueness. Rather, it is the uniqueness of each human actor which gives their act of promising its power. For, as with any Arendtian action, making a promise depends on a plural collective. The act of promising cannot by its nature be unilateral - to make a promise to oneself is utterly meaningless and guarantees nothing in terms of worldly stability. Instead, promise, as an action, is always a *reciprocal* act which keeps in check to a certain extent the unpredictable natures of each individual involved without requiring a suppression of their individuality (Arendt, 1998: 236-247; 1976: 460-479).

Accordingly, the force of promise is not, as might be mistakenly concluded, due to a forcible restraint of one's uniqueness, but due to the force of reciprocity which binds individuals together in their uniqueness towards a common goal (Arendt, 1998: 236-247). Or, as Arendt concisely puts it, "The force that keeps them together…is the force of *mutual* promise" (Arendt, 1998: 244-245) [my italics].

Thus through mindful action, but particularly through promise and forgiveness, we not only repair our world, we renew it – we expand its boundaries so that it is ever more inclusive of human diversity. In contrast to the earth which as Arendt notes is given to us, the world is largely made by us through our actions. And as makers, we have a responsibility to build the world so that it is in harmony with its purpose: to provide a space wherein human beings can grow and flourish through relating to one another (Arendt, 1998: 236-247).

Ultimately Arendt shows us that the actions through which we make our world, though never wholly predictable in outcome, are able to shape the world in ways which fortify its borders and enhance or humanness *when such actions are carried out with the intent of creating a world hospitable to plurality* (Arendt, 1998: 236-247). And this is all Arendt asks of us, that we "think what we are doing" (Arendt, 1998: 5).

Consequently, to return to the issue of Arendt's private/public split, we can now see more clearly that when someone's humanness is impinged upon in the private realm, the public realm risks the dearth of that person's presence. Thus, any oppression that takes place behind closed doors, not least the oppression of women, is within the Arendtian framework, a *public issue*. In other words, an endemic lack of safety affecting certain groups of people in the private sphere is a matter of *worldly concern*. On this argument, to politicise private instances of oppression does not spell the demise of the private sphere and subsequently the public sphere, but rather expands our world and makes it more inclusive via the liberation of the oppressed. So, while the world Arendt appeals to us to create is one comprised of distinctly separate public and private realms, it is also one in which the personal can be political (Arendt, 1998: 22-78, 236-247).

Irigaray's Culture

Like Arendt, Irigaray is also appealing for us to create a world or, specifically worlds, wherein our humanness can be cultivated. Human culture, for Irigaray, is a living, fluid thing. It needs to be consistently fed by us if it is to survive, let alone thrive. And because, as Irigaray reveals, *relationality* is central to the human experience, any cultures developed by human beings for human beings need to grow out of and be conducive to our relations – with nature, with ourselves and with each other – if they are to enrich and expand our human horizons. Yet, counterintuitive though it may seem, we are hurtling towards an increasingly dehumanised way of being. western life today offers, at best, a simulacrum of a culture wherein proprietorship is valued at the expense of relationship (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996).

In support of Irigaray, I would argue that the quest for ownership has become so ingrained in our thought processes that we have blinded ourselves to the extent of our self-imposed alienation. In thinking about this issue today I was bemused to come across a news item where baristas are being replaced by mechanical arms that can operate an espresso machine. There

was nothing in the tone of the report that expressed unease at yet another aspect of western life where the need for even the most rudimentary human contact had been dispensed with. On the contrary, it was hailed as a 'good thing' – as a further step towards a desired universal destination. For the most part, we in the west seem to be intentionally aiming for a way of life wherein we each wall ourselves in with a cocoon of possessions and have our wants and needs tended to by technology rather than by each other. In the process we lose touch with what we *actually* want and need (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996).

Our humanity cannot survive such a dystopian prospect. And while some might take my stance here to be simply one of anti-technology, there are nuances in my argument which suggest otherwise. Technology is an aid that enhances human life tremendously where it is used in the service of human life – which is to say, in support of, or at least not in obstruction to, our existence as relational, intersubjective beings. However, where technology is relied upon to such an extent that it creates barriers between us (for example, where the virtual relationships of cyberspace all but replace real life interactions with flesh and blood human beings) we put our human world – our cultural potential – at risk. Perhaps this tendency towards self-imposed alienation is as much a reaction to the contingencies of life as the reigning political philosophies which seek to mould us into an undifferentiated and obedient One. Technological advancement, it would seem today, is no longer the way forward in terms of what it means to be human. Rather, it appears to be leading us further away from our ontological roots (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996).

the need for a culture that grows out of nature

In taking stock of this situation, Irigaray asserts that we urgently need to reconsider nature – including ourselves as natural beings – in order to create cultures in sync with our humanness. We need, in other words, to go back to our pre-human origins in order to build worlds from those foundations that harmoniously align with our first mode of being (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996). On this, she states:

> The manufactured world transforms each of us into a somebody, who has lost one's capacity for feeling, except perhaps at quantitative level. Finding again the perception of life and of happiness in their variety could be possible through a return to an environment where nature

> could be experienced in its multiple sensorial qualities and temporal rhythms. (Irigaray, 2004b: 201)

By making this assertion, Irigaray is not proposing that we regress to a perpetual state of nature wherein our creaturely aspects would supersede our human ones. Rather, like Arendt, Irigaray fully comprehends that the possibility for human culture cannot occur in nature's wilderness alone. What she is positing is that by reacquainting ourselves with our natural origins, our situation is lent enough clarity to enable us to perceive that we are interrelated to the universe. We are not beyond it, nor do we precede it – we are an inextricable part of it. Therefore, if we are to create a culture conducive to our becoming, we must stay faithful to that fact. Which requires us to view the conditions of our existence as not a shackle but a gift. For, with this change of mindset comes the ability to recognise limits: to respect the fact that we are not the whole but simply a part of cosmic life (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996; 2002a).

Within this space of recognition, limitations are honoured as the guardian of diversity. Thus, it is within this paradigm that we are afforded the insight that we, as human beings, are at least *two* in kind. We are not neuter. We are sexuately specific, sexuately dimorphic beings. In comprehending the inherent multiplicity bestowed upon us by nature, we are charged with the task of building cultures which start from a foundation of at least *two.* Two: which implies relationality (Irigaray, 1996).

> It is also necessary to recover the relationship with other(s). There too, our surroundings, culture and political habits make us a gathering of somebodies without relation between them, unless a subjection to goods and laws imposed from the outside and from on high. (Irigaray, 2004b: 201)

proprietorship at the expense of relationship

Irigaray argues that we have in considerable part lost sight of our relational existence – we have lost the very ability to relate – through the excessive and increasingly absurd pursuit of ownership. Our human need for relational cultures goes wanting while the business of accumulating possessions for the sake of 'having' occupies more and more of daily life. The extent to which the value of goods has surpassed the value of human life has become so

entrenched in the west that even left-wing political theory which aims at liberating the oppressed falls into the trap of prioritising goods over human life, and consequently overlooking relationality altogether (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996; 2002a). As Irigaray comments in her critique of socialism below (which I have included in its entirety lest its message be weakened):

> 1. Is it not the case that socialism has emphasised goods at the expense of people? Are not the people it invokes already alienated in this relation to the possession or non-possession of goods? To the point indeed of only speaking about people as 'goods' in a legal perspective, and not free and responsible civil subjects.
> 2. Does not socialism have a preconception of the person as a social product constructed at a particular moment in History, without a meaningful, autonomous relationship between nature and culture?
> 3. Is it not this concept of the person that then allows you to speak about the individual as neutral? If you focus on whether or not they own property, whether or not they are producers, whether or not they are defined in relation to the means of production, then individuals might well be considered neutral. (Irigaray, 2004b: 215)

Accordingly, through her critique of socialism, Irigaray makes clear that what passes for culture in the west today obstructs human becoming – which is, by nature, relational – precisely because we have not remained true to our ontology of sexuate difference. In denial of our natural origins, let alone our sexuate specificities, we have ended up with a contrived, one-size-fits-all model which tries in vain to turn us, both women and men, into something other than we are. We have mistaken being human for being One/Man, immortal, infallible and utterly self-determining. This is a fixed ideal and as such the culture it has given rise to is also fixed – airless, stagnant and stale. It is lifeless. It is an ideal completely at odds with the reality of our being, and as such leaves us all, to varying extents, lacking in culture which is to say, homeless (Irigaray, 2004b: 197-234; 2008; 1996; 2002a).

Hence, the natural world, if we open ourselves to it – which is to approach it outside its western definitions of immanent, submissive, pliable, matter rightfully owned by man – can teach us how to create cultures in tune with our being – in tune with life and reality (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107). As Irigaray states, using the woods as a particular representation of the natural world,

> Beyond the fact that they provide us with the material elements we need to survive and grow as living beings, the woods teach us that, as long as it remains alive, matter – hyle – produces its own form(s) – morphe. When we pretend we are those in charge of giving form(s) to matter, we act as denigrators of life. (Irigaray, 2016: 72)

Here we see the crucial difference between Arendt's world and Irigaray's culture. Though both pertain specifically to the human experience, Irigaray's culture is in direct communion with nature. Irigarayan culture flows from nature and lets nature lend it its form – which, far from being an essentialist or biologically reductionist claim, gives us infinitely greater scope for cultivating what it means to be a sexed, human being than does our present western order (a point which we shall revisit in greater depth). In other words, for Irigaray, human becoming cannot be accomplished if we seek to sever ourselves from nature, literally or symbolically. And because we are at least two – naturally marked by a sex that is either female, male or a unique variety of both – it is necessary that the cultures which flow from our morphous origins remain faithful to our particular morphologies. As soon as we deny our form(s) or try to impose one form onto another, we veer further away from the reality bestowed upon us by nature and further towards absurdity and oppression (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107).

What Irigaray is saying, and I would firmly agree, is that one person's way of being in the world, their experience of the world, and their specific needs from the world necessarily differs from another of a different sex. Which automatically necessitates the need for more than one world, one culture. And, as we are by now well aware, the problem we have in the west today is not only that the male sex claims to be the absolute in terms of humankind, but that it does so without any acknowledgement of its natural limits – as a male or as a human (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107; 1996).

Thus for Irigaray, building cultures – ones that are truly conducive to human life – requires humility. It calls for a recognition of the fact that we are not wholly self-determining beings. Our form is given to us by nature. Culturally speaking, each sex is limited to its particular morphology. Which is to say that beyond its morphological contours there lies the potential for a space – a negative – which separates the sexes, allowing each one the *unlimited* room to cultivate a world without bumping up against the other, without creating a situation where one sex can use the other as material for their world – a platform from which to transcend (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107; 1996).

Thus within the confines of reality, the horizons for human becoming pertaining to each sex are infinite when they take place in a space – an open topology – that is itself infinite and ever-expanding. For this reason, Irigaray cannot be justly accused of biological reductionism nor of essentialism in the traditional sense (Irigaray, 2008; 1996).

So, the worlds imagined by Irigaray which develop in the space of the negative, though in constant touch with our natural origins, represent our cultural surrounds – the home in which we can become human most fully. They comprise of, among other things, structures, artifice, possessions and ideologies, but, unlike the western order of today, acquisition and proprietorship are neither the main focus nor aim (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107; 1996). Unlike today:

> Most of the time, we have lost the perception of the difference between meeting living beings and meeting things, be they material or spiritual, that we made. (Irigaray, 2016: 85)

And through this transition of "culture" to cultures, the notion of oneness would be replaced with a respect for difference. Consequently, the negative space between the at least two cultural worlds is a *relational* space. It is the place where one sex can communicate its truths to the other and be attentive and receptive in turn. Neither proprietorship nor domination are afforded a foothold in such a space. And, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the space of the negative, as a relational space, constitutes a world of its own – one which represents the culture of communion, inter-subjectivity and a being-with. It is a shared cultural space that keeps each sex in relation to the other without creating a hierarchy of importance (Irigaray, 2016: 3-107; 2008; 1996).

Thus, in Irigaray's envisioned worlds, women are subjects. They define who they are and create their culture in accordance with their lived experiences – widely diverse experiences which cannot but wholly remove their emerging and ever-fluid culture from current western notions of the eternal feminine. In Irigaray's vision, women no longer serve as the phallic object which shores up Man's cultural identity – which, ironically, fill *his* lack. Correspondingly, men are equally subjects in Irigaray's vision. Though subjects who no longer rank higher simply by virtue of a baseless value judgment of each sex. There is, indeed, no ranking in Irigaray's vision at all. Oppression is a foreign notion in Irigaray's longed for existence (Irigaray, 2004a; 1996).

> Above all, though, the power of the one over the other will be no more. Difference that is irreducible never ceases to curb the capitalization of any such power, or mere authority over (Irigaray, 1996: 105)

Namely, where difference is understood to be irreducible, the structures and ideologies upon which oppression feeds necessarily dissolve. In such a scenario, one's transcendence does not rely on another's immanence. Rather, recognition of the irreducible difference between woman and man allows for a new way to engage with transcendence, equally, together and untainted by power relations (Irigaray, 1996). In such a culture…

> Transcendence is thus no longer ecstasy, leaving the self behind toward an inaccessible total-other, beyond sensibility, beyond the earth. It is respect for the other whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent. Neither simple nature nor common spirit beyond nature, this transcendence exists in the difference of body and culture that continues to nourish our energy, its movement, its generation and its creation. (Irigaray, 1996: 104)

In other words, when Irigaray posits her vision of a truly human culture(s), neither woman nor man comprise the absolute – hence, the ever-present question underlying her work: *If I can become the whole, where is the transcendence?* Consequently, Irigarayan culture is by definition plural – there are at least two cultures which correspond to our respective sexed morphologies and which equally exist within a wider, shared framework. That each culture is

always in relation to the other is key in Irigaray's thought – the wider, shared framework being the locus of communicative exchange (Irigaray, 1996).

Because intersubjectivity and relationality are two of the cornerstones in Irigaray's view of culture, she places much emphasis on a yet-to-be-created female subjectivity/culture. And while it may seem paradoxical on the face of it, in aiding women to develop their own subject-hood, Irigaray insists on the creation of an objective ground for women upon which they may cultivate their as yet unformed identity. Irigaray sees it thusly: though women are defined as objects in the western world, they have no objectivity of their own and, therefore, no self-determined foundation upon which to create a subjectivity. Or to word it another way: today in the west, woman lives as an object because she is denied objectivity about her subjectivity – she is defined by a perspective foreign to her own. In saying woman needs *her* objectivity, Irigaray is saying that woman needs to be able to define herself in her own terms (Irigaray, 1996).

In taking this aspect further, Irigaray looks at the practicalities of how a feminine objectivity might be established by considering the issue of civil rights. Firstly, she notes that sexuate difference has been unsurprisingly absent in the formation of our civil rights as they generally exist in the west. Namely, the fact that we co-exist as at least two in kind is denied in favour of the apparently neutral, covertly phallocized, citizen for whom such rights are formulated and to whom such rights attach. Consequently, these rights, applicable only to a fictional entity, cannot but be elusive as far as protecting the actual individual is concerned, especially the female individual (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 224-229).

> Our civil codes do not wish to have anything to do with natural coexistence. This explains why they are virtually silent concerning the rights of individuals as such. When it is a question of such rights, they become abstract and as imprecise as is necessary to avoid any definition of singular civil status. In this way they become incomprehensible to citizens when speaking of the rights of individuals or between individuals. In contrast, when it comes to the ownership of goods, they are concrete, prolix, rich in singular detail. (Irigaray, 2004b: 228)

Again, Irigaray's teasing apart of the issue of our cultural lack returns her to the western preoccupation with proprietorship at the expense of sexuately specific cultures and, in turn, of human life itself (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 224-229).

> The qualities of goods seem to mask those of individuals, and ownership seems to take place of the desire to exist, and of care for life itself. (Irigaray, 2004b: 228)

Hence, Irigaray's assertion that a reformulation of civil rights stemming from and in harmony with our natural belonging – wherein we are at least two in kind and, as such, requiring of rights specific to our particular sexuate morphology – would simultaneously give women the foundation of objectivity they so urgently need in order to become subjects whilst displacing the overinflated worth we currently ascribe to goods and revaluing them in terms of their service to life (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 224-229).[54]

the marketability of woman: virgin/mother/whore

Indeed, an order in which we value goods over and above human life and an order wherein people, but especially women, are perceived as goods and treated as such, are two sides of the same coin. In creating at least two sets of civil rights – one specific to each sex – Irigaray foresees the possibility for an emergence of at least two kinds of human culture; cultures wherein relational existence and care for life replace validation through ownership and degradation of the alien other. In addressing how sexuately differentiated civil rights might come into being, Irigaray looks particularly at the current situation of woman, and how a lack of rights appropriate to her sex has enabled the commodification of the female body so that girls and women are reduced to a type of exchangeable good – traded on the market, appreciating and depreciating in value in terms of their virginity, reproductive capacity, and caretaking abilities (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

[54] In defending and clarifying Irigaray's stance on sexuate civil rights, Alison Stone says:

> …sexuate rights must actually be understood not as sexually specific rights but as universal rights to express oneself in one's sexual specificity. Irigaray, therefore, does not envisage a law which promotes a unified set of images of femaleness, but a law which guarantees all women the conditions to develop cultural expressions of their individual female natures. (Stone, 2006: 215)

In this light, the first right appropriate to woman conceived of by Irigaray would be the incontestable right of absolute autonomy where her own body is concerned. This multifaceted right contains a myriad of challenges to contemporary western culture (and arguably all cultures, past or present) too numerous and nuanced to give it the space it deserves within the scope of this thesis. However, broadly speaking, if such a right were to be implemented and abided by, women and girls would no longer be perceived, either consciously or unconsciously, as a good to be traded from father to husband and so on. For, though in Australian law wife as "chattel" has long since been repealed, woman's general status as such lingers within the western cultural imaginary and corresponding symbolic order (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

This is evident in the excessive focus and symbolic import placed on female virginity: virginity in the literal sense of whether or not the hymen is intact. Such focus ultimately reveals the dominant cultural perception of woman as man's possession – an object whose seal is, by rights, broken by the 'object-owner'. Thereafter the object, no longer pristine, cannot but vary in value. Indeed, within the dominant western mindset, the mutable value of woman depends on how well she performs the part of virgin, mother and/or whore – the only three roles afforded to her in the western symbolic order and all of which relate to her virginity, or lack thereof. Moreover, because of the nature of such roles, whichever one or more any particular woman is associated with, each situate her in a position of servitude to man (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

Such a perception of woman, to which her virginity – her perceived purity – is central render her limited in terms of 'use-value' and, as such, identity. Namely, woman's exclusive ability to bear children to continue the male lineage, to provide a culturally acceptable outlet for the masculine sexual drives, to be the site of family honour (of which her purity – which is to say, her intactness – is paramount) and to provide nurturance and care in the private sphere are the only aspects of woman which remain once her potential identity has been distilled through the western phallocentric lens (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

So, while the consequences of this reigning view of woman are manifold, all are oppressive. To allow woman autonomy over her body as a civil right – one Irigaray demands be enshrined in law – could only help destabilise accepted practices of men:

- Possessing virgins to found the symbolic order of their culture,

- Practicing real incest within the family. (Irigaray, 2004b: 206)

Consequently, enacted civil rights protecting woman's bodily autonomy and, thus, her identity, would aid in liberating her from the many and varied oppressions to which she alone is particularly subjected. For example, such rights, as Irigaray envisages them, would allow greater means to avoid forced marriages between men and women/girls – whether forced overtly or by way of more covert measures, such as social and economic pressures to adhere to heteronormative standards. Further, civil rights specific to women would ideally enable women to freely and autonomously exercise their entitlement as to whether or not to bear children. This would naturally imply women's ready and safe access to birth control, legalised abortion clinics and services, and family planning and counselling services. All such structures, in keeping with such a right, being regulated by women for women [55] (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

Civil rights for women, when viewed through an Irigarayan lens, also brings to mind the question of violence against women, and in particular, rape. For, though the offense of rape – wherein women are the primary targets and men the primary perpetrators – has long been prohibited by law in the west, instances of rape continue to occur with heinous regularity and, oftentimes, with little or no punitive consequences for the perpetrator. It is thus conceivable that the ideology underlying rape (and indeed all forms of violence against women) would be made vulnerable to destabilisation in a world where sexuately specific civil rights attach to women: such ideology which, though inadequate but for the sake of brevity, can be described as a hego-masculine need to violently exert a phallicized power over woman in order to shore up one's masculinity. For, such rights could only aid in severing woman from her perceived status as 'good' or 'object' whose purpose of existence is to be possessed by the 'master/subject' (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

So while it is clear at this point in our discussion that civil rights for women would arguably help create a situation where woman alone is the guardian of her own virginity and bodily and spiritual integrity, it is perhaps not yet clear that such a move would also enable women to

[55] At present, there are no legal abortion services available in the state of Tasmania, my home and the place from where I am writing. Here, a woman in need of an abortion is forced to travel interstate. Aside from the logistical impracticalities of this, the absence of a state clinic implies the conferral of a profound state of disgrace upon any woman in need of an abortion.

control representations of their sex, and prohibit those which reinforce masculine notions of her as a sexual object, consumable or tradeable good (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

> The law must protect girls' right to moral virginity by imposing images and language consistent with the value of women's sexuality. This means that public signs, as well as mass media programmes and publications, must respect women's sexual identity. It would be a civil offence to depict women's bodies as stakes in pornography or prostitution (passed on by advertising to a lesser extent). (Irigaray, 2004b: 206)

Importantly, what we have touched on above is, for Irigaray, merely what the basic principles of such civil rights might consist of. True to her understanding that a culture fit for human becoming stems from nature, Irigaray sees that women's civil rights would necessarily extend to the environment and promote a respect for life (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234; 2016: 3-107).

> In laying claim to rights concerning virginity and procreation, women already put the emphasis on a right of being and not only a right of having. But they have to go further. Women must demand laws concerning the respect of the earth itself, the respect of life and health, environment and happiness. (Irigaray, 2004b: 197)

Ultimately, Irigaray equates a world wherein each sex has the freedom to create and access their own culture in harmony with the other – sexuately specific civil rights providing "a necessary frame for this accomplishment becoming possible" (Irigaray, 2004b: 197) – with happiness. Namely, where we are each afforded the space to perfect our becoming as sexuate beings – that is, where we are able to create cultures – 'homes' – which expand our horizons and humanize all, we are free to experience a kind of happiness that is not readily accessible today, and certainly of little cultural value in the western paradigm. It is a kind of happiness that is borne out of cultural relations between sexuately different human beings who are ever mindful of the Earth as our first home and utterly infused with our cultural growth (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234).

> Rescuing the planet Earth means, too, being concerned about happiness, as much for ourselves as for others. Happiness of this kind does not so much, has nothing to do with economic calculations, or, at least, it should not have – but is, perhaps, the highest form of happiness if we learn how to perceive it, to contemplate and to praise it. (Irigaray, 2004b: 231)

A culture of sexuate plurality

In summary then, a reverence for earthly life is, in Irigaray's thought, an essential pathway to the formation of ethical culture(s) – a world where the potential lies for a space to open up between each sexuate kind of human being, giving each the unlimited room required for them to endlessly perfect their human becoming in harmonious difference with the other. And at this point, we are again reminded of perhaps the greatest potential for a schism between Irigaray's and Arendt's respective stances on being and becoming human: unlike Irigaray, Arendt does not see that in ideal terms, nature-to-culture, earth-to-world, would flow as a continuum. There is a clear cut off point in Arendt's thought between our earthly existence and our human status (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234; Arendt, 1998).

Indeed, an Arendtian philosopher may argue that, as the basis of Arendt's human being depends on the clear separation of public and private spheres, there is an equal need to maintain a clear conceptual divide between earth and world lest we continue down our current road of increasing dehumanisation, exclusion and oppression. Yet, on considering our discussions in this chapter, I would argue that Irigaray's thought on culture provides a framework in which the Arendtian vision of world can reach its fullest potential. For Irigaray affords us the ability to recognise our ontological foundations as beings of the earth, corporeal, and at least two in sex. This primary reality of our existence must remain in our consciousness if we are to fully understand and accomplish an Arendtian world wherein each one's irreplaceability and infinite uniqueness is revered and safeguarded as that which makes us human (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234; Arendt, 1998).

Leaving aside the crudity of any argument that doggedly equates animality with the private realm and humanity with the public realm, I propose that Irigaray's unwavering focus on our earthly status within her vision for human culture(s) does not dismantle the boundaries between the private and public spheres within Arendt's model. Namely, just as there is a continuum from nature to culture, so too is there one from private to public. The Arendtian need for spaces to act in the presence of others and to retreat from the public glare is not undermined by Irigaray's uniting of nature and culture. Both scenarios are not only capable of co-existing, they in fact complement one another. How much richer would our words and deeds be, how greater would their power be to humanise, if we *fully* acknowledged and respected our inextricable connection to the universe and, from that, our sexuate specificities which situate us differently in the world? (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234; Arendt, 1998).

Equally, I am suggesting that Arendt's thought provides further scope for the cultivation of our humanness within Irigaray's vision. Whereas Irigaray provides a foundation of sexuate difference from which cultures may develop, Arendt adds nuance to such cultural development by narrowing the focus on each one's utter and precious uniqueness, be they female, male or differently sexed. Central to the work of both thinkers is the urgent need for relationality to replace the growing alienation that seems to be increasingly characterising our life in the west. As with Irigarayan nature and Arendtian earth discussed in the previous chapter, Irigarayan culture and Arendtian world when perceived together, bring to light the untapped potential for an ethics of sexuate plurality – an ethics wherein relationality and meaning are given an even greater chance of infusing our existence, thereby humanising it (Irigaray, 1996; 2004b: 197-234; Arendt, 1998).

Chapter 7 – Sexuate / Plural Narrative Ethics

My intention in this chapter is to explore the power of the narrative as it is revealed to us in the respective bodies of work of Arendt and Irigaray. In a follow on from the previous chapter wherein Arendtian 'World" and Irigarayan 'Culture' were revealed as the locus, outcome and generator of human *meaning*, I shall now focus on the special role of narration, or storytelling, in enriching and expanding our cultural horizons. Namely, our human need to make sense of the world through story, both through telling and listening, is perhaps the most powerful tool we have at our disposal for humanizing one another and allowing the truths of our uniqueness and sexuate specificity to come to the fore.

Our explorations shall begin with a close look at Arendt's writings in relation to the ability of story to blow apart many of the smokescreens that enshroud us in contemporary western life and disclose an underlying reality: reality of the self, of the other and of the world. Moreover, I shall show how this function of storytelling holds regardless of whether we attempt to deny reality through coating it in a fiction with the desperate hope of it becoming fact (as is demonstrated in Arendt's study of Isak Dinesen), or whether we set out to deceive for the sake of our immediate safety but at the expense of our world-in-common (as Arendt considers in her study of Berthold Brecht). However, what will become most evident is how meaning – that which makes us human – is worth salvaging for the sake of the integrity of our worldly boundaries. Namely, through her study of Walter Benjamin, I shall show how, though stories become stale and apparently lose all meaning, there may be hidden pearls of wisdom within them that can be removed from their outdated contexts and told anew in a way that is relevant to our lives here and now.

From that point I will then turn to the thought of Irigaray, whose appeal for women to find a language of their own would appear to be achievable through each woman's ability to tell her story, thus allowing a narrative identity to manifest. In looking at this possibility, I will discuss how who one uniquely is – as revealed through story – is always a sexed being. That is, our sexed body is not an abstract social category but, as human beings, part of *who* we are. It provides the natural and cultural foundations from whence we develop and become.

In brief, then, by looking at both Arendt and Irigaray's thoughts on narrative power I seek to show how a thoughtfully produced story, that is one that is told in good faith and in keeping with reality – irrespective of how unwelcome or perplexing such reality might be - can allow our identities to form in harmony with our unrepeatable individuality, which starts with the sexed contours of our body. Namely, I seek to show how storytelling, as the ultimate relational tool unsurpassed in its ability to disclose our sexed uniqueness, is pivotal to the ethic of sexuate plurality I am seeking to establish.

Becoming human through storying the self

For Arendt to be human is, among other things, to share in the listening to and telling of stories: to partake in the creation and recreation of meaningful narratives, including but by no means limited to those narratives of identity (i.e., life stories) which explicitly mark out each person as unique (Arendt, 1983: 22; Cavarero, 2006). As Arendt remarks,

> '[T]he narrative has been given its place in the world, where it will survive us. There it can live on – one story among many. There is no meaning to these stories that is entirely separable from them – and this, too, we know from our own non-poetic experience. No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story.' (Arendt, 1983: 22)

Revealed in this statement is Arendt's contention that the stories we tell (provided they outlive us to some extent through repeated re-tellings) surpass in meaning all other durable worldly objects that help us to orient ourselves in the world *as human* (Arendt, 1998: 95). Consequently, our stories (or narratives) are no mere conveyances of information. Be they factual or fictional, stories are profoundly multilayered in the telling: as rich in subtext and context as actual text with all three intertwining to create a wellspring of meaning (Arendt, 1983: 95-249). That is why information without a story in which to wrap itself (for example a mathematical equation or abstract statistical data) tells us very little about what it means to be human (Arendt, 1998: 3-4).

Or, to word it another way, the narrative – the imaginative piecing together of a series of events so that they tell a story – is a quintessentially *human* practice. Whether we are actively aware

of it or entirely oblivious, we constantly and consistently negotiate our ever-changing world and lives through the art of story. From the most mundane and inconsequential happenings to the strangest and most exquisite aspects of life, we orient ourselves to all such experiences by fashioning them into narratives. Naturally, this implies that such experiences are understood as having a beginning, middle and end. Yet it is not merely the linear temporal flow of the narrative (ever-present even when beginnings, middles and ends are not relayed in that order) that in and of itself reconciles us to our experiences. Rather, it is the *meaning* that emerges from a narrative that lends us some stability in what would otherwise be an unanchored and confounding existence (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero, 2006).

The kind of meaning I am referring to – meaning that orients us to the world – is such because it illuminates a reality of our world. In so doing, a meaningful narrative gives us some sure-footedness on forever shifting worldly terrain. In borrowing Lessing's metaphor, Arendt describes the collective meanings borne out of the art of narration as the "pillars of the best-known truths" (Arendt, 1983: 10).

> For long ago it became apparent that the pillars of the truths have also been the pillars of the political order, and that the world (in contrast to the people who inhabit it and move freely about in it) needs such pillars in order to guarantee continuity and permanence, without which it cannot offer mortal [women and] men the relatively secure, relatively imperishable home that they need. (Arendt, 1983: 10-11)

Yet, there are narratives and there are narratives. Not all are created equal in their ability to shed light on our existence and imbue our lives with human meaning, a fact of which Arendt is keenly aware (Arendt, 1976: 460-479). Throughout Arendt's body of work, she reveals that the fabric of our world – i.e., the resulting symbolic and material structures of certain words and deeds that have been woven together to form our human realm – is sturdiest where it is fortified by the substance of a "*properly* narrated story" [my italics] (Arendt, 1983: 22). For there is nothing quite so powerful as that when it comes to producing a meaningfulness with the capacity to endure generation after generation, albeit in an ever-evolving form as we shall see (Arendt, 1983: 95-249).

So for Arendt, the art of narration, if it is to be proper, which is to say world-enriching in terms of breadth, depth and quality, entails certain crucial elements. Namely, the *properly* narrated

story is at once relational and unique, a discloser of truth and defender of plurality, staunchly faithful to reality and utterly fluid in meaning. In this way, a strongly related narrative serves to enhance clarity and intensify our understanding of the common world, each other and ourselves. Certainly, it serves to develop our capacity for judgment of worldly happenings, be they immeasurably great or infinitesimally small.[56] As a consequence, where a story combines these alchemic qualities, it is inevitable that it will be told and retold, time and again, thus ensuring it outlasts its mortal tellers and audiences alike (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006).

Indeed, no human-crafted thing can weave its thread into the fabric of our world without being subject to reification (Arendt, 1998: 95). And this is especially true of the story – ephemeral by nature and, as such, in greater need of the concretization afforded it through repeated retellings. Without reification, stories fade from memory until it was as if they never were.[57] And with their disappearance, some meaning is lost from our shared world. Yet, this is not to say that tired narratives should not die a natural death. What was relevant and meaningful at one time may not necessarily be at another. And this is a matter of judgment (Arendt, 2003).

However, as Arendt makes clear, there are certain stories that should never be forgotten. There are certain words and deeds that need to be retold and remembered by way of story for the sake of our very humanness (Arendt, 1976: 460-479). For example, the Holocaust happened. The unprecedented systematic murder of six million European Jews in the mid-20th century

[56] Indeed, for Arendt, the loss of a moral yardstick brought about by the events of the mid-20th century do not, as some might assume, render us incapable of judging right from wrong. As author, Maurizio Passerin D'Entreves, states:

> Once these rules (of common sense) have lost their validity we are no longer able to understand and to judge the particulars, that is, we are no longer able to subsume them under our accepted categories of moral and political thought. Arendt, however, does not believe that the loss of these categories has brought to an end our capacity to judge; on the contrary, since human beings are distinguished by their capacity to begin anew, they are able to fashion new categories and to formulate new standards of judgment for the events that have come to pass and for those that may emerge in the future. (D'Entreves, 2007: 247)

All of which is to suggest that, through the meaningful telling of stories, we have significant means to formulate anew ethical standards of judgment relevant to human life as it is lived here and now. For further discussion of this idea, see Mrovlje (2014).

[57] The power of reification can be seen in one of the more extreme responses to halt it, namely book burning. Whether a story stops being told through a gradual loss of interest or it is forcibly removed from our cultural stores via, say, book burning, the effect is the same. It is as if those stories, and the real-life events that they may allude to, never were. For more on the phenomena of book burning see Boissoneault 2017.

happened. The stories that arose from this atrocity are still being told. There are the stories of survivors, their children, and their children's children. There are the stories of those who actively took part in the genocide and those who resisted. There are the stories of those who watched on silently in horror and disbelief and there are the stories of many others besides.

Each narrative emerging from the Holocaust, because it is told from a unique perspective, has the potential to lend new insight into what happened, why it happened and what it might mean for us as human beings. For each such narrative potentially has the power to teach us something about our humanity, even now, seventy plus years later – not least the enormity of our capacity for senseless violence and the ease in which it lends itself to systemization within the mores and conventions of modern western civilization (Birmingham, 2003: 53-73). If the tellers of the Holocaust are silenced, if their stories are forgotten, we lose the lessons such stories might impart and we deprive ourselves of the meaning they add to our understanding of ourselves as human beings (Lipstadt, 2016).

If we allow such stories to fade from human memory, we also risk falling prey to falsehoods and absurdities of the most dehumanizing kind. For example, the existence of pseudo narratives that flatly deny the fundamental fact of the Holocaust would gain a surer foothold in a world where the overwhelming evidence to the contrary goes un-storied (Lipstadt, 2016). Suffice to say, regardless of how they may vary in content, the *validity* of each narrative is dependent upon its adherence to the inarguable fact that the genocide took place. That is, reality is at the heart of every story *properly* told (Arendt, 1994b: 307-323).

Thus, we can see that there are certain narratives which pertain to lives, events and phenomena so significant in terms of our shared world that they possess the enduring ability to shed light on what it means to be human. Such narratives may evolve throughout the passage of time, but their ability to inject meaning into the world – their ability to indiscriminately humanise each one of us, whether we are located at the world's centre or its margins – remains unmarred and without equal (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006).

In other words, it is through the proper formation of a narrative, told and retold, that we are most effectively brought face to face with our humanness. Consequently, a meaningfully told story best places us to relate to one another empathically and, as such, has the especial ability to shape our world in ways hospitable to plurality. In exploring how the aforementioned crucial

elements of a "properly narrated story" come into play, we will, in what follows, undertake a close analysis of Arendt's studies of three distinguished writers: Isak Dinesen, Walter Benjamin and Bertholdt Brecht. As we shall see, when viewed through an Arendtian lens, the work of each of these distinctly different writers illuminates the various facets essential to the *meaningful* telling of a story (Arendt, 1983: 95-249; Cavarero 2006).

Isak Dinesen – distinguishing our uniqueness through story

In her essay on Isak Dinesen, Arendt is quick to clarify the central importance of reality to the tale being told. Which is to say, a narrative with the power to give us our bearings in the world – that is, a story that enables us to make sense of our place in the world and to measure the weight of worldly happenings – is one in which a *truth* is conveyed. The storyteller's truth: formed in the storyteller's unique perspective, but utterly and completely developed in reaction to the actual goings-on in the world – that sphere of life that lies outside the confines of one's autonomy and, thus one's control (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006). In making this point, Arendt focuses on a statement of Dinesen's: "be eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story" (Dinesen quoted in Arendt, 1983: 97). For Arendt this means no less than,

> Be loyal to life, don't create fiction but accept what life is giving you, show yourself worthy of whatever it may be by recollecting and pondering over it, thus repeating it in imagination this is the way to remain alive. (Arendt, 1983: 97)

To use one's imagination to artfully piece together a series of otherwise abstract and potentially meaningless happenings into a narrative arc, is to thread those happenings together so that they form a concrete, identifiable event. An event – a story – that can in its entirety be mulled over, harnessed as a tool to judge the import of various worldly phenomena and ultimately used to expand our understanding of ourselves and all to with whom/which we are in relation. In short, stories make life meaningful – imaginative retellings heighten our experience of reality – provided they are coming from a place of authenticity (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; 1976: 460-479; Cavarero 2006).

There is a resounding difference for both Arendt and Dinesen between the creative use of the imagination to turn events into a narrative so as to illuminate their meaning and its use in the

concoction of pure fiction designed to mislead. While the former lets reality steer the tale, the latter attempts to force reality into its design – it is the storyteller's futile attempt to claim authorship of and power over that which lies beyond her/his sphere of control, especially the future. Indeed, this style of fabrication to which propaganda lends itself so readily, seeks to foretell what lies ahead which such unswerving conviction that nihilistic absurdity is bound to result. We have explored the divorce of ideology from reality in Chapter 3 through the examples of Marxist historical determinism and fascist biological determinism. And the divorce of the narrative from actual events is no less destructive (Arendt, 1976: 460-479).

> "When the storyteller is loyal…to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is emptiness…" (Dinesen in Arendt, 1983: 97)

It is crucial for Arendt that the narrative develop *after* the event – in reaction *to* the event. Namely this particular art form, if it is to provide us any insight into our human existence at all, must unceasingly imitate life. In looking at Dinesen's particular struggles from her father's death when she was ten years old up until the demise of her first marriage, Arendt concludes that the problems affecting Dinesen during this period were greatly exacerbated by her futile attempt to live out the fairy tale she had woven for herself and so wanted to believe. Through her study on Dinesen, Arendt makes clear that the power of storytelling is such that one contributes to one's own undoing when one aspires to a live a life in imitation of art (Arendt, 1983: 95-110). In making this claim, Arendt identifies a shared theme in several of Dinesen's tales wherein she writes about…

> … the "sin" of making a story come true, of interfering with life according to a preconceived pattern, instead of waiting patiently for the story to emerge, of repeating in imagination as distinguished from creating a fiction and then trying to live up to it. (Arendt, 1983: 106)

Which is not to imply that Arendt believes a life which inspires art as opposed to imitates it is bound to be problem free. Rather, Arendt firmly understands that life presents each of us with particular challenges and burdens from birth till death, regardless of how authentic or inauthentic one's approach to life is. However, it is by accepting the reality of these challenges

and burdens and making sense of them through imagining them into the form of a narrative that we are given the strength to endure whilst remaining ever in relation to our humanity (Arendt, 1983: 95-110). Hence, Arendt highlights a particular quote of Dinesen's,

> "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them." [Dinesen] The story reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings. (Arendt, 1983: 104)

In other words, where the story comes before the event – where one is not "loyal to the story…loyal to life" (Arendt, 1983: 97) – the world has the potential to become a most confounding and constraining place. For, without acknowledging reality, we cannot get a handle on it. We remain ignorant of the potential for human meaning contained within that reality and, therefore, at a remove from our own humanness. The narrative, more than any other art form, helps us reconcile ourselves to reality, no matter how harsh, bewildering or inhuman it may be (Arendt, 1983: 22, 95-110).

> It is true that storytelling reveals the meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are, and that we may even trust it to contain eventually by implication that last word which we expect from the "day of judgment". (Arendt, 1983: 105)

In revealing human meaning and orienting us to the world, a properly narrated story intensifies our existence. It makes us more real, so to speak. More layered. More nuanced. More human. (Arendt, 1983: 95-110). Says Arendt in her writings on Dinesen,

> Without repeating life in the imagination you can never be fully alive… "lack of imagination" prevents people from "existing." (Arendt, 1983: 97)

When we tell a story – when we arrange our perception of events into a narrative – *who* we uniquely are is made ever more visible. In other words, that narratives are not only meaningful

but *shared* is equally important to Arendt's ethical appeal for a world that embraces plurality. For in telling a story – i.e., relating a narrative – one discloses *who* one uniquely is to her/his listeners, often despite oneself. That is, the story-teller's distinct personality (or *who-ness*) infuses each word she/he utters, revealing as much about her/himself as the story she/he tells (at least to the discerning listener) (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006). A small illustration of this can be found in the barrage of criticism directed at Arendt upon (and even before) the release of her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1994a). Such criticism, almost wholly consisting of charges of 'victim-blaming' the Jewish people and of using an inappropriate or sarcastic tone throughout the book (Fry, 2009: 127),[58] is responded to by Arendt as follows,

> 'When people reproach me with accusing the Jewish people, that is a malignant lie and propaganda and nothing else. The tone of voice, however, is an objection against me personally. And I cannot do anything about that.' (Arendt, 1994b: 16)

Indeed, *who* one is, as opposed to what one is in terms of their identity categorisations, cannot be suppressed when one tells a story, when one reacts to a story or when one is the subject of a story. In other words, each one's irreplaceability – i.e., the ontological fact of our human plurality – is emphasised through narrative. The art of storytelling brings us face to face with the fact that each person is unique and it is the distinct differences between each person that makes a story compelling. The narrative, therefore, arguably has the greatest potential to dispel xenophobic thought and action and, in its place, motivate us to work towards a world that is hospitable to plurality (Arendt, 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006).

> We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human. (Arendt, 1983: 25)

The narrative then, as a form of dialogue encouraging communicative exchange among a plurality of different people is thus a device through which ethical human bonds can be forged.

[58] For a more ambivalent view on Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1994a) see Benhabib (2007) who considers this work of Arendt's as emphasising our equal value as plural human beings at the expense of the ethical need to be equally valued at the political and moral levels. My own thoughts on this essay of Benhabib's are that Arendt's emphasis on plurality provides a basis for equality of worth among all human beings at *every* level.

That is, different people with necessarily different perspectives are united by the sharing in common of a particular story. This does not require, as might mistakenly be assumed, that each person in due course mould their perspective to a single viewpoint. On the contrary, to do this is to divorce oneself from reality and thus risk losing sight of the very plurality that makes us human (Arendt, 1998: 7-21; 1983: 95-110; Cavarero 2006). As Canovan comments in her analysis of this aspect of Arendt's thought,

> Men [and women] have a common awareness of reality, not when they are all seeing and thinking in identical ways, but, on the contrary, when they are all seeing and thinking about the same objects (whether physical or spiritual objects) from their own different points of view…looking at it from his [or her] point of view, will supplement every other [woman and] man's point of view, providing them all with a rich and concrete sense of reality… (Canovan, 1977: 82-83)

In disclosing who she uniquely is through story, Dinesen reinforces one of Arendt's main philosophical tenets: the future is open; spontaneous action is inherent to the human condition and we have not the ability to rigorously live according to a preconceived storyline. And despite the dominant western paradigm where authorship is the be all and end all, this is not a bad thing. A properly formed narrative never precedes the events it is trying to make meaning out of. The very notion is absurd. Rather, it forms after the events have concluded and even then, only when such events have been imagined time and again until they produce a meaningful account of what happened (Arendt, 1983: 95-110).

As Dinesen herself realises, one's life story is never done until one's death. Therefore the legacy each person ultimately leaves – the narrative of their life which most reveals *who* they were – can never be known to one during their lifetime. While we are each the protagonist of our own life story, we are fated to remain in the dark as to its final contours and content. It is the task for those who survive us to look at our life in its entirety and, if it is deemed worthy of telling, shape it into a story that then has the ability to form part of our world's fabric.

In making this realisation, Dinesen recounts the tale of a man, unaware as he walked and stumbled back and forth during the dark of night that his trail of footprints had left behind the

outline of a stork (Arendt, 1983: 95-110). On reflecting on this aspect of Arendt's study of Dinesen, Cavarero thus poses the question:

> 'When the design of my life is complete, will I see, or will others see a stork?' [Dinesen] We might add: does the course of every life allow itself be looked upon in the end like a design that has a meaning? (Caverero, 2006: 1)

In seeking her answer Cavarero turns to Arendt:

> According to Hannah Arendt, Blixen's [Dinesen actual name] 'philosophy' suggests that 'no one has a life worthy of consideration about which a story cannot be told.' (Caverero, 2006: 2)

Which is to say, every human life has the potential to form a meaningful design. So what makes a life worthy of consideration and thus suitable for a meaningful re-telling through story? In an Arendtian framework, the simple fact of being human and therefore, irreducibly unique, renders each person's life as potentially worthy of consideration, if only by one other person. Namely, a life worthy of consideration need not give rise to a story of great renown. Very often the story of a life never ventures beyond the private sphere (Arendt 1998; Cavarero 2006).

> "for fame the opinion of one is not enough," [Seneca] although it is enough for friendship and love. (Arendt, 1983: 155)

And if Arendt appears to place a priority on fame over friendship and love insofar as one's life story is concerned, it is because the former allows the story to endure, to be told and retold in both the public and private spheres and, in the process, weave its way into the fabric of our world, fortifying, enriching and expanding it. Yet, for one's life to become the subject of a narrative so prominent that they attain the immortality of fame, the protagonist must be judged by a significant number of those surviving her/him – close and afar – as worthy of remembrance (Arendt, 1998; 1983: 95-110).

Walter Benjamin – keeping meaning alive through re-contextualisation

For Arendt and many of her contemporaries, Walter Benjamin, friend, intellectual and literary critic, is particularly worthy of this distinction. Not merely for his own remarkableness as a unique human being, but for his special ability to locate the enduring meaning within a narrative – its essence – in order to tell it anew and thus keep the meaning alive despite the passing of time through which it would otherwise grow stale (Arendt, 1983: 153-206).

As Arendt tells us, human beings need tradition. Tradition gives us roots and orients us to a world forever in flux. Yet paradoxically, Arendt is equally aware that tradition can become outdated and thus absurd within the context of contemporary life (Arendt, 1994: 307-323). In our following discussion of Arendt's study of Benjamin, we shall see that storytelling can retain a thread which takes it from past to future whilst being fluid and staying relevant, staying *meaningful* (Arendt, 1983: 153-206).

As a temporal philosopher, what primarily concerned Arendt was how the unprecedented events of the mid-20th century tore an irreparable hole in the apparent time continuum. After that upheaval, what lay in the past seemingly bore no relation to the present and thus, was no longer able to provide a solid structure upon which the future could coherently unfold. Generations of traditions, including the stories, myths and narratives we had been handing down for centuries, no longer had the ability to orient us in the present and guide us towards a relatively known future. As such, the meaning of our lives as human beings, along with the meaning of our shared world, sucked out through that hole in time, left an unnavigable abyss in its place (Arendt, 1994: 307-323).

Which is why Arendt is especially struck by Benjamin's work: for Benjamin has the rare ability to pick through the wreckage of the past and identify the enduring value in certain of its remnants – remnants which have morphed beyond easy recognition and would be overlooked through any regular viewing. In making his find, Benjamin removes these exotic pieces from their past casings and brings them into the present, re-contexualizing them in the process and allowing their meaning to be understood anew. Benjamin's work, in other words, helps to mend the broken fabric of our world so that it may once again become a place of shared human meaning (Arendt, 1983: 153-206).

In contemplating Benjamin's skill for this particular style of world renewal, Arendt is reminded of the following verse from Shakespeare's *Tempest*,

> III. THE PEARL DIVER
> Full fathom five thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made,
> Those are pearls that were his eyes.
> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.
> - The Tempest, 1, 2
> (Shakespeare quoted in Arendt: 1983: 193)

In undergoing the "sea-change" certain elements of our old traditions, not least our most dependable narratives, crystallise. That is, such stories shed what have become irrelevant, thus retaining only their value – their human meaning – in the most unadulterated form. For, as time goes by, the meanings of our traditions change, but they do not necessarily die. Even where there exists a rent in time so great that it is beyond repair, the remnants of the past contain pearls that can be extracted and made meaningful again in the context of the present. Arendt sees Benjamin's gift for extracting the pearls as helping to rebuild a solid ground upon which the present can be made comprehensible once more and thus better placed to give rise to a meaningful future (Arendt, 1983: 153-206).

One of the more notable ways in which Benjamin worked to make new meaning out of old was through his select collection of quotes – quotes that, when removed from their original context, took on new life, thereby affording us fresh insight into what had long since become irrelevant and absurd. In other words, in Benjamin's hands, old narratives which had grown stale, transformed into new ones that were applicable to the present and thus better equipped in aiding us to make sense of human life as it is experienced now (Arendt, 1983: 153-206). In demonstrating how this took effect in his study of German tragedy, Arendt notes that Benjamin

> …boasted of a collection of "over 600 quotations very systematically and clearly arranged" (Briefe I, 339),… this collection was not an

> accumulation of excerpts intended to facilitate the writing of the study but constituted the main work, with the writing as something secondary. The main work consisted in tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their raison d'etre in a free-floating state as it were. (Arendt; 1983: 202)

These fragments 'torn free' by Benjamin from their outdated contexts are what Arendt refers to as 'thought fragments'. She sees that within them lies an essence – a truth – that can throw light on the meaning of our current experiences. A new narrative is then able to form around the thought fragment so that it can once again inform us in an intelligible way that corresponds to our time something of what it means to be human (Arendt, 1983: 153-206; Cavarero 2006). As Arendt explains, Benjamin's way of thinking…

> …delves into the depths of the past – but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things "suffer a sea-change" and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes…. as "thought fragments," as something "rich and strange," and perhaps even as everlasting Urphanomene. (Arendt, 1983: 205-206)

Benjamin's ability to discern the treasures amongst the wreckage – to retrieve them and give them new life so as to throw light upon the darkened recesses of our world, made him, in Arendt's eyes, a 'poetic thinker'. For it is the poetic power rather than the practical components of certain language in which Benjamin identifies the preciousness of past narrative fragments – that is, he isolates and collects words, phrases and quotes that evoke rather than instruct, or in other words, reveal a truth not skewed by dogma (Arendt, 1983: 153-206). As Arendt explains it, Benjamin's approach was:

> …not to investigate the utilitarian or communicative functions of linguistic creations, but to understand them in their crystallized and thus ultimately fragmentary form as intentionless and noncommunicative utterances of a "world essence" (Arendt, 1983: 205)

Though, as Arendt notes, despite his gift for thinking poetically, Benjamin was no poet. And this observation of hers, I think, only emphasises that while there is a valid human need to categorise and classify in order to understand, we at the same time need to unceasingly question, flex and sometimes reshape the boundaries of our categories and classifications, so that we don't become beholden to a limited, depleting and ultimately meaningless way of being in the world (Arendt, 1983: 153-206).

So, while Benjamin himself was no poet, his way of viewing the world drew to him those of like mind, among them some of the finest poets of the mid 20th century. One such friend and contemporary was poet and playwright, Berthold Brecht, with whom, notes Arendt, he shared the rare ability to see and illuminate what actually *is*. As she comments,

> In Brecht [Benjamin] found a poet of rare intellectual powers and, almost as important for him at the time, someone… whose intelligence was uncommonly close to reality. (Arendt: 1983: 168)

And it is to Brecht we now turn for, like Dinesen's prose and Benjamin's literary criticism, the best of Brecht's poetry and plays holds for Arendt the capacity to create narratives which expand worldly space, thus allowing for human plurality – each one's uniqueness – to thrive and grow (Arendt, 1983: 207-249).

Bertold Brecht – the revelatory power of poetry

Arendt reserves a special place in the world for poets. For her, the poet, more than any other teller of story, possesses the ability to reveal the reality of what *is* in its most human context. In the revealing, the poet and her/his audience work together in a peculiar fashion to produce a certain kind of narrative that illuminates and communicates something of the world that is otherwise hidden – a 'truth', so to speak, which brings us face to face with the ontological fact of human plurality before anything else (Arendt, 1983: 207-249).

> …the only way to determine unequivocally how great their sins are is to listen to their poetry – which means, I assume, that the faculty of writing a good line is not entirely at the poet's command but needs some help, that the faculty is granted him and that he can forfeit it. (Arendt, 1983: 218)

And from the above quote it is clear that Arendt in no way regards all poetry as equal. There is good and there is bad. There is the sublime poetry which introduces the listener to a new perspectival plane and then there is the propaganda which merely masquerades as poetry, causing our world to stagnate and crumble inwards. With respect to Brecht, for instance, Arendt is well aware that amongst his prolific body of work are many pieces written in a vain attempt to bend reality to his desires or simply to deceive outright in the interests of self-preservation but at the expense of the world.

Yet, for all Brecht's questionable poetry and plays, he is nevertheless redeemed for Arendt by those writings of his which so artfully and subtly reveal glimpses of a "world essence" – the most primary being the magnificent fact of human diversity – i.e., our world *is* because of each one's uniqueness, thus our world *thrives* wherever our individual uniquenesses are acknowledged and encouraged (Arendt, 1983: 207-249; 1998).

Brecht's work, when it was faithful to the reality of what was going on around him, smashed through the political platitudes of the time and brought one face to face with the most painful truths. In looking at this aspect of Brecht, Arendt refers to one of his plays on communism in Russia, written and performed during the early days of Stalin's regime, *Measure Taken.* And, perhaps most interestingly, written at a time when he was a dedicated member and staunch defender of the Communist Party,

> God knows, Brecht never earned less thanks from his friends and comrades than with this play. The reason is obvious. He had done what poets will always do if they are left alone: He had announced the truth to the extent that this truth had then become visible. For the simple

> truth of the matter was that innocent people were killed and that the Communists, while they had not stopped fighting their foes (this came later), had begun to kill their friends. (Arendt, 1983: 241)

And perhaps even more so than his plays, Brecht's poetry, when it was good, illuminated like no other poet of his generation the ultimate hollowness of political dogma and its stunting effects on our growth as human beings (Arendt, 1983: 207-249). And we might at this juncture of the discussion recall Plato's aversion to poetry and his utter exclusion of poets from his ideal society, described in intricate detail in his most notable work, *The Republic*.

And, true to our platonic legacy, political order as we know it in the west and poetry have never mixed well. While the order of western political regimes is founded on the suppression of certain realities, poetry has a different kind of order – subversive, fluid and utterly at odds with any system that seeks to govern by way of selective truths and constraining directives (Arendt, 1976: 460-479). Namely, poetry – good poetry – has as its essence, truth: not Platonic Truth, but truth with a small 't'; truth that pertains to a particular place and time and is perceptible only from certain vantage points; truth that, were it to remain buried, would further entrench the more disempowered persons of the world into their particular form of oppression (Arendt, 1983: 207-249).

Thus the poet is neither the personification of disorder nor the catalyst of societal undoing that Plato believes her/him to be. Rather, through the non-rational and evocative rearrangement of language, the poet has the ability to reveal to us our lived realities in their most nuanced and clarified forms. In doing so, the poet calls upon us to reconcile ourselves to such realities – to live and act in relation to such realities, and to develop an ethic, an ethos, in response to realities that leave all of us wanting, to varying degrees, in terms of human recognition and the freedom to become (Arendt, 1983: 207-249).

Consequently, for Arendt, of all the narrative forms, the poem has a particular strength (and paradoxical ability) in conveying the ineffable veracity of our situation. Arendt sees poetry, then, as especially privileged in its ability to infuse our lives and our shared world with the human meaning it needs to survive, let alone thrive. It is interesting, then, that through either poetry or prose, Arendt does not believe that the weaver of a narrative has the capacity to

consciously and authentically tell her/his own story. Which is to say, Arendt believes that we are each eternally hidden to our self – we shall never see our self as clearly as an outside observer can (Arendt, 1998: 175-247).

> This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is – [her] qualities, talents, gifts and shortcomings, which [she] may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (Arendt, 1998: 179) [my parantheses]

Therefore, what aspects the narrator reveals of herself when telling a story, be it her own or someone else's, is for Arendt, disclosed by her unknowingly and visible only to her audience.

> ["Who" one is] can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this "who" in the same manner [she] has and can dispose of [her] qualities. On the contrary, it is more likely that the "who" which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person herself… (Arendt, 1998: 179)

Consequently, the very nature of each one's unrepeatable 'who-ness' reinforces the idea that intersubjectivity lies at the very heart of the human condition. Without intersubjective relations, and particularly those wherein our narratives are formed and shared, our experiences of individual human being and becoming – which goes hand in hand with the formation of our identity – is but a very partial one (Arendt, 1998: 175-247). In considering this aspect of Arendt's philosophy, Cavarero comments:

> The expositive and the relational character of identity are thus indistinguishable. One always appears to someone. One cannot appear if there is no one else there. (Cavarero, 2006: 20)

Like Cavarero, I believe that this tenet of Arendt's philosophy holds firm alongside the claim that, despite Arendt's belief to the contrary, one is never *completely* shielded from her 'who-

ness', and is thus able to intentionally reveal an aspect of her genuine self through the autobiographical act of self-narrative. Thus I would argue that, without veering too sharply from an Arendtian path, we each harbour some knowledge of "who" we are that is not perceptible to those around us unless we choose to disclose it. Yet, even the act of disclosure cannot guarantee that the one to whom we are disclosing will necessarily comprehend that element of our "who-ness" which we are consciously trying to convey. Just as we may not always be able to understand "who" we are when conveyed to us by another (Arendt, 1998: 175-247; Cavarero 2006).

To elaborate, in a solid return to Arendt's school of thought, I believe that one has the ability to recognise undiscovered aspects of her unique self when hearing her own story as seen through another's eyes and formed in another's words. For when certain of her words and deeds are weaved into a story by an outside observer and relayed back to the protagonist of the story, the *meaning* behind such words and deeds is revealed to the protagonist for the first time – a revelation which affords her a deeper knowledge and awareness of her own identity, as she experiences it and as it is perceived by others. (Arendt, 1998: 175-247, Cavarero, 2006). As Cavarero demonstrates through the example of Ulysses,

> In hearing his story, then, Ulysses is moved to tears. Not only because the narrated events are painful, but because when he had lived them directly he had not understood their meaning. It is as if, while acting, he had been immersed in the contextuality of the events. It is as if, each time, he were captured in the present of the action that cuts off the temporal series of before and after. (Cavarero, 2006: 18)

Thus, the act of narration, in revealing 'who' we are to ourselves and others, holds time together enabling it to run in a seamless flow from past, present to future. That is, acts of narration give rise to a temporal setting within which we can orient ourselves as human and build a meaningful world where unfettered human becoming is central to its existence (Cavarero, 2006: 17-31).

So, while we as humans are, ontologically speaking, plural beings – that is, we are each one qualitatively unique – without the ability to express and perceive our uniqueness through the relational act of narration, the fact of our plurality goes largely unacknowledged. And unless

we can fully acknowledge this fact – which is to say, the infinite richness of human diversity – we cannot adequately build a meaningful world wherein we can each comfortably orient ourselves and become, in relation to the other, all that we can be. Narration, therefore, corresponds to the vital human need to explore our uniqueness, engage with it, embrace and encourage it. Narration, in its ability to disclose and relate, is perhaps the best world-expanding, world-fortifying tool we have at our disposal to aid us on our ceaseless journey of human becoming (Arendt, 1998: 175-247; 1983: 95-110; Cavarero, 2006).

And perhaps it is important to remind ourselves at this point that the relational power of the narrative lies in its ability to lend meaning to the events of our lives not only at an individual level, but in a shared context. That is, the narrative has the effect of humanising both our daily doings and epic achievements because it promotes a shared understanding of our actions without requiring us to forego our unique perspective (Cavarero, 2006).

Relating one's truth requires the art of narration

In this light, let us now turn to the thought of Irigaray who throughout her philosophy insists upon the need for women to be able to speak *as* women, using their own voice, which they have yet to find. For, as we have discussed in the previous chapters, if women are to build a world within which they are at home, they must be able to define themselves in their terms, to speak of their realities in their own words, through the use of a language peculiar to their symbolic order – a yet-to-be language of the feminine (Irigaray 1996; 2004a). Consequently, in the remainder of this chapter we will consider, in light of Irigaray's thought, how the act of narration is powerful in its potential to aid women in finding their voice and, thus, is an essential feature of an ethics of sexuate plurality.

> Art is more critical than morality if we are to enter a culture of humanity formed by beings-in-relation… (Irigaray, 2013: 22)

In considering Irigaray's above statement, we can see that to develop an ethics of sexuate plurality, the art of storytelling – be it by way of prose, poetry, music, imagery, etc. – is an essential part of the process. Namely, when artfully composed narration – arguably unsurpassed in its capacity for subtly and nuance – provides the basis of genuine

communication from one to the other, each one incomparably unique, the possibility opens up for an ethic to develop in accord with our ontological status as relational beings (Irigaray, 2013: 1-22) .

In contrast moral edicts, as Irigaray's aforementioned quote implies, very quickly ring hollow without the context of a genuine narrative to house them. For example, 'though shalt nots' are both absurd and meaningless when left to stand alone. And even when they are woven into tales of morality that aim to instruct, such tales often fall short of a narrative with the capacity to instil our lives with human meaning. For, despite their apparent intentions to preserve human life and dignity, dictates of those kinds, delivered from on high by an invisible, unquestionable authority, do little in the way to humanise us. Unsurprisingly, they do not foster a relational way of being in the world. Moreover, the invisible, unquestionable source of western morality, as conceived wholly in the masculine and undeniably patriarchal, only serves to reinforce the asymmetry present in our social and symbolic orders wherein women are 'lesser' (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

In brief, morality as we know it in the west, estranges us from one another in its unyielding demand for compliance and its simultaneous ranking of human worth. It lacks the artistry required to give rise to empathic relations and expand our various horizons, both individual and shared. As Irigaray clearly states throughout each of her contributions to the feminist philosophical canon, if we are to live most fully as beings-in-relation, and thereby eradicate notions of human rank, we need to acknowledge the unacknowledged: the Feminine. A feminine symbolic order can only be brought into worldly existence through the language, gestures and accomplishments of women *as* women (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008).

For it is only they who are in the unique perspectival position to create a cultural morphology in line with their own contours. Indeed, women, by virtue of their sex, are the only ones qualified to *speak* their sex into existence – to create their identity through their own narratives, thus wresting it from the distortions and devaluations of present-day western culture (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008). Yet, how do women speak their truths without a language of their own? Perhaps the only way at present is for them to experiment with narrative – to continue to story and re-story the self – so that they may come to learn of themselves and relate it to others – relate *with* others – through the making visible of their narratable selves: noting that we are

referring to the 'the narratable self' in the same sense as Cavarero who, in opposition to notions of the postmodern subject, states,

> Although she is immersed in this tale, the narratable self is not the product of the life-story which the memory recounts. She is not, as the experts of narratology would say, a construction of the text, or the effect of the performative power of narration. She coincides with the uncontrollable narrative impulse of memory that produces the text, and is captured in the very text itself… [The narratable self] lies rather in a narrating impulse that is never in 'potentiality' but rather in 'actuality,' even when it refrains from 'producing' memories or reproducing past occurences. (Cavarero, 2006: 35) [my parentheses]

our stories reveal our sexuate specificity as a part of *who* we uniquely are

In other words, to make visible one's narratable self through story, is to render perceptible one's 'who-ness' to oneself and surrounding others. This act, as Irigaray shows us in a way that Arendt cannot, always begins with one's sex (Cavarero, 2006: 32-45). As Cavarero explains,

> Despite Arendt's reticence on this point, one must affirm that, being born, there always appears to the world a sexed who… Indeed sexual difference does not qualify the existent, it does not specify the what, but rather embodies the newborn's uniqueness from the moment of this inaugural appearance. The one who is born does not yet have any qualities; and yet has a sex. (Cavarero, 2006: 38)

Accordingly, Irigaray's appeal that the ontological fact of our sexuate difference be recognised has the possibility of being achieved through the act of narration – especially through the autobiographical act of self-narration. Yet, women speaking through narrative, regardless of the subject matter, are still acting to develop a language of their own. In so doing, women are able to reveal to the discerning listener aspects of the feminine that are not readily in masculine western culture (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2008; Cavarero, 2006).

For instance, Irigaray has devoted much of her writing to her relation with the natural world which, strictly speaking, cannot be classified as wholly autobiographical. In storying her perceptions and experiences of nature, through poetry and prose, she allows her readers to view nature in a way uncommon to the west – that is, as infinitely precious and intrinsically valuable in its own right, rather than endlessly expendable of utilitarian value only (Irigaray, 2016).

reconciling the nature /culture opposition through the versatility of story

By her particular use of language, which as often as not veers away from the accepted grammatical rules, she reveals nature – i.e., the vegetal world, the elements of earth, water, air and fire, the changing of the seasons, non-human animal life, *ourselves* as natural beings, etc. – as interconnected and inter-relational, rather than stand-alone, hierarchically ranked and within man's grasp (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2016). In her following poem, Irigaray illuminates our interconnection with each other as human beings and also with the natural world, her use of language disrupting the usual order of syntax whilst nevertheless telling a story:

> In communion
> With her
> Through the air:
> Medium of life
> Bath of breath,
> In which mingle
> Warmth, smells, sounds.
>
> With you
> Breathing is becoming different,
> Fresher,
> Higher,
> Altitude,
> That gathers us together
> Making each of us one,
> Creating the we.

Between the two : love
Linking us,
Multiplying us,
Like flowers
Whose petals
Open and close
To receive,
To welcome.

The limits are marked again
Through breathing in
A more subtle air
Unifying the flesh
For new embraces.

Unless we return in her
To be born again
Once more

(Irigaray, 2004: 150)

Irigaray also experiments with "re-mything" as a form of narrative which holds the natural world and sexuate difference in a new light (Irigaray, 2013: 113-137; 2016: 1-20). For example, by subverting the traditional understanding of Antigone, Irigaray reveals hidden elements which correspond to the possibility for a feminine symbolic.

> If Antigone rebelled against Creon, it was not in the name of subjective passion, not to say the caprice of a teenager who is not yet capable of understanding what governing the city required, as some valorous intellectuals claim… Passage to a culture of simple survival through subjection to values or ideals more or less arbitrarily constructed by men, Antigone opposes with a radical "No". (Irigaray, 2016: 19)

In conclusion, the narrative as the quintessential human way of making sense of the world, holds the rare power of most clearly disclosing the uniqueness of both the storyteller and the protagonist (be they one and the same person or not). And, as each one's sexuate specificity is primary to their uniqueness, women, through the art of story, can make visible the fact of sexuate difference (Irigaray, 1996; Cavarero, 2006). That is not to dismiss those countless women who have been telling stories for centuries and, in doing so, making the feminine more present in the world. Rather it is to say that women must not tire in continuing to tell their stories.

For, the more women weave their experience into narratives and share their perspectives and stories with others, the more chance women have of redefining themselves in their own words. In this way, a space can open up for the feminine to be cultivated and shared. Ultimately, for woman to speak as woman – insofar as that is presently possible – and especially through the use of the narrative, increases the generation of the kinds of meaning that gives rise to a relational experience, thus expanding our individual, sexuately specific horizons and our common, shared horizons (Irigaray, 1996; 2004a; 2007; 2008; Cavarero, 2006).

Much of this chapter has focussed on the narrative in the form of autobiography or biography, which are only two of many genres to which the narrative can be applied. Consequently, it is important to reiterate that regardless of the subject content of one's story, the storyteller always reveals something of who she is in the telling. Her singular perspective, her unique voice, her stresses and accents, her choice of tale… all of these things provide a glimpse into *who* she uniquely is. And in doing so, potentially enriches the perspective of the listener by affording her the opportunity to experience the world from the standpoint of another. Which is no less than to allow the listener to realise that the other is an existent in her own right, that she has an equally valid place in the world and, thus, an equal right to contribute to and share in the world (Irigaray, 1996; Cavarero, 2006).

Having said that, I share with Cavarero a particular love of the autobiographical narrative. For though I agree with Arendt that we cannot know ourselves completely, I nevertheless believe we have access to parts of our self that are not visible to others. And when we choose to share such aspects, relational bonds are especially fortified through our deliberate act of communicating a hidden part of ourselves. The particularity of the narrator is never so evident,

and the interest of the listener in attempting to understand another necessarily different from themselves is never so keen (Cavarero, 2006).

By way of example, throughout most of her writing career, Irigaray has revealed little of her own story. And while this, as she no doubt intended, allowed her readers to approach her philosophy without being overly distracted or unduly influenced by a greater knowledge of *who* she is – her reticence with respect to her own life has nevertheless resulted in much curiosity about it. And while such interest over one who diligently maintains their privacy is often motivated by prurience, it seemed to me in the case of Irigaray, the general desire for her readers to know her personal story was akin to their need to better contextualise her philosophy and thereby attain a deeper understanding of its complexities. In other words, it seemed to me that there was a gap that needed filling in order for her philosophy to be accessed at a more profound level.

healing the self whilst humanizing the self: the power of autobiography

In recent years, and particularly in her latest book, *Through Vegetal Being* (2016), Irigaray has started to blend autobiographical narratives with her philosophy. Consequently, her work resonates with me on a much deeper level. In the opening chapter of Through Vegetal Being, Irigaray recounts tales of childhood, and particularly her affinity with the garden, with nature, which was reinforced for her at a young age by unhappy circumstances.

> …my mother was really angry… I was weak because I had not eaten for some days, but, instead of stretching out her arms and embracing me, she shouted at me "Go away into the garden!". Amazingly, her behaviour did not affect me too much. In the garden, I felt at home and pacified, and I did not ask for more to recover my health. (Irigaray, 2016: 11)

From this opening story, Irigaray goes on to relate incidents involving her adult self, all the while imparting a philosophy in cultivation of life; her identification with Antigone being an especially poignant narrative which simultaneously reveals something significant of *who* Irigaray is and what she is appealing for ethically. For example, after her expulsion from the

Freudian School of Paris in 1974 and the ensuing personal and professional ostracism she encountered, Irigaray writes:

> Expelled by the presumed key players in the institutional and societal worlds… I thus tried to regain life itself… I mostly received these from the macrocosm: from the air, the sun, the vegetal world. I paid extreme attention to this source of life and searched for a new possible path to relate to, or with it… I returned to the figure of Antigone, which I understood in a new way, as if my situation had something in common with hers. Except that what happened to the one was almost the opposite to the lot of the other. She had been deprived of the air, the sun and all the environment necessary for living, whereas I was sent back to it, which had become worthless to my contemporaries. Their lack of interest in life itself is what saved my life–and my thinking. (Irigaray, 2016: 17)

The relational power of story: linking and diversifying us

Thus, the narrative is, at its core, utterly relational. It is perhaps unsurpassed in its ability to connect us to one another and promote empathy through dismantling xenophobia than any other form of interactive communication. As human beings, who need to make order and sense of our lives and the world in order to find meaning, we weave stories all the time – often without being aware of it (Arendt, 1998; 1983; Irigaray, 1996; 2016; Cavarero, 2006).

My appeal is that, to create a strong ethic of sexuate plurality wherein each person is valued for who they uniquely (which always begins with the sexed body), we become more conscious of the stories we craft and share, while at the same time becoming far more attentive to the narratives of others. I ask that we suspend preconceptions and defences and be open to the story of another, and consider what they have to say in the context of sharing the world, and respond in a way that promotes understanding that we, as human beings, are relational, sexuately diverse, and each one wonderfully unique (Arendt, 1998; 1983; Irigaray, 1996; 2016; Cavarero, 2006).

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

Whether we are hyper aware of it or only vaguely attuned, our world, at least our culture in the west, simultaneously suppresses human sexuate difference and individual uniqueness. Our culture adequately recognises neither and, in doing so, to varying extents actively denies each one's right to *be*. The reasons underlying such denial, though myriad, can ultimately be traced back to a fear of the unknown: death, change, unpredictability, and human vulnerability. western culture blinkers us to the fullness of our reality for fear of the uncontrollable elements that necessarily lie within it. That this conceptual move has even been made possible is understandable if we consider that when we are in the midst of a situation, it is not always easy to discern what is actually going on around us.

Thus, at the risk of generalising but at the even greater risk of leaving unsaid what urgently needs to be addressed, I would argue that western culture, to those who are within it, seems a good enough fit for many. And this is so despite what I believe to be an ever-present sense that things are slightly off-kilter. If one has a job, a home, a family, enough to eat, a relatively safe environment, a basic education, regular leisure time – all hallmarks used to epitomise western society – then it is easy to dismiss as baseless any undercurrents of unease and despondency that may follow one about in their day-to-day life. Such indefinable pressures and discomforts, because they have no perceptible cause, can be readily shrugged off altogether or at least reduced to merely a personal idiosyncrasy.

However, where one lacks one or more of the aforementioned western hallmarks, it is far easier for one to pinpoint the apparent cause of their troubles and, thus, far harder to dismiss them as a non-concern. Every woman, for instance, by virtue of being a woman automatically occupies an environment which poses more danger to her than it does men. The risk of rape, assault, and domestic abuse, to name a few, are statistically all significantly higher for women. For another example, homelessness in the west is rife. Without the safety and comfort of a permanent roof over one's head, or any assurance of where one's next meal is coming from, let alone the means to change their situation for the better, the undercurrents of unease and despondency that are arguably present in the lives of even the most privileged westerners have the capacity to morph into feelings of hopelessness and terror.

If our world was safer, if a home, enough food, a basic education and a job was assured for everyone, the western utopian ideal would appear to be realised. That we have not been able to realise such an ideal, despite the tireless efforts of so many is, I think, a sign to more deeply consider the nature of the inequities which characterise the west. It seems that it is not just a matter of attempting to reverse the inequities as they arise, but rather to start regarding such inequities as symptoms of something greater – to start looking for an underlying cause which, if addressed, might spell the end of oppression as it manifests in the west – from unexplained feelings of dissatisfaction to abject poverty and physical harm.

Irigaray identifies the underlying factor with respect to all western-based oppressions as a largely imperceptible, deep-seated asymmetry in our culture. One where woman *qua* woman is forcibly barred from existing, thus rendering our culture wholly masculine in type and reliant on the continued suppression of one kind of human being over another. Tracing the roots of all western-based oppressions, in their many and varied manifestations, to a single cause may seem like Irigaray is taking the path of reductionist logic - which, understandably, is a favoured mode of reasoning amidst the abounding and unwieldy inexplicabilities in our culture. However, far from conceptually trimming back reality so that it fits neatly within the clearly defined preconceived categories of the west, Irigaray's supposition explodes their very boundaries. Namely, in revealing the west to be a specifically male symbolic order, she compels us to re-question our understanding of everything we took for granted as fact with respect to our ontological basis.

At this juncture, it would be fair to raise the apparent situation that women's ascribed status as 'lesser' is by no means imperceptible as is claimed above. Indeed, the first, second and third wave feminist movements together with the constant struggles and negotiations for women's rights throughout the centuries would surely attest to this. But Irigaray's assertion goes far deeper than this. She is claiming that what we define as 'woman' within the western imaginary is in fact a masculine construction which has supplanted the possibility of actual women being free to grow and experience life outside of a foreign perspective and, thus, create their own identity.

When a stand is taken for 'women's' rights – a relevant and necessary stand, Irigaray would not dispute – it goes for the most part unseen that remedying such wrongs is not simply a matter

of obtaining appropriate rights. For inadequate rights is a result of a more complex issue: that women are denied as being one of at least two kinds of human beings. The problem of rights, therefore, does not originate at the social level. It originates at the ontological level. That is, until we properly address the ontological fact that at least two kinds of human beings exist, the ground upon which actual women stand is a slippery one at best. The many gains achieved by and for women are always at risk of slipping away again. [59]

To elaborate, in the western order man is human whereas woman, defined through the masculine perspective as man's derivative, is imperfect human. This has come about because language, as the heart of culture itself, has been formed in the west within a hegemonic masculine mindset. Yet, because of its purported universality, it is deemed equally proper to everyone. If one cannot adequately perceive let alone express their own truth through such language, it is the speaker rather than the language deemed to be at fault. Thus western language and the culture from whence it grows consistently reinforces the notion that women are faulty human beings. A not-perfect version of man. And this situation does not end with women. It extends to all human beings, male or female, who fail to fit the phantasmic mould of Man as it is conceived of within the phallocratic paradigms dominating the west.

Where does language come from? How can we enrich it so as to create cultural symmetry wherein everyone is valued as unqualifiedly human regardless of sex or gender? For Irigaray, because the issue is one of an attempted erasure of the female sex, resolving it first requires an understanding of our sexed bodies as the site of language production – the basis of our cultural world(s). How we imagine our world, how we build our culture, corresponds directly to how we envisage our bodies. The western phallicized notions of what it means to be human not only focusses solely on the male sex at the exclusion of the female, but re-imagines the male body in terms of the phallus: erect, powerful, penetrative, dominant, masterful. It thrusts. It dictates. It is beyond questioning. It is law.

The language that arises from such bodily imaginings cannot but place value on the act of gaining power by way of disempowering another. In this scenario, then, woman perceived as lacking, as bearing a 'wound' instead of a phallus, herself becomes a phallic object. A thing to

[59] For example, many US abortion laws stemming from the case of *Roe v Wade (1973)* which legalised the woman's right to choose are at real risk of being revoked in the current political climate. For more information, see Glenza & Morris, 2018.

be grasped, penetrated, dominated, mastered. Her existence proves the superiority of Man. That our western order is founded on such notions automatically places each of us within a myriad of different power dynamics where we are each hierarchically arranged in a binary of either more-or-less empowered and, as such, more-or-less human. The less one's body corresponds to the phallic ideal, the less one's gender aligns with the hegemonic masculinity of Man, the more one is likely to find themselves in a situation where they are bearing the heaviest weight of oppression.

It is important to realise that the weight of oppression too, however, presses down on the one who metes it out. For, where one feels compelled to impose restraints on another in order to achieve an ultimately unachievable cultural standard, one is at odds with their ontological status – which is to say, at odds with reality – and never on stable, comfortable, 'human' ground. I would argue that the hostile environment one creates for another inadvertently creates a hostile environment for oneself, though of a very different kind. The genuine empowerment of the oppressor in any such scenario is an illusion at best.

In reflecting on this particular point, where the exertion of one's masculine will over a feminine/feminized other, one's appropriation of the feminine/feminized other, reflects the dictates of reigning western logic, a new clarity is lent to the overwhelming number of recent incidences where such logic has, in particular, brought carnage into the lauded 'haven' of the family home. To explain: though the nuclear family of the west is giving way to more diverse family structures, its underpinning ideology which places Man at the 'Head' of the family remains dangerously intact. For, within this mindset, women and children are on some level reduced to household possessions. Mere chattels devoid of personhood, subject-hood and the unquestionable right to an independent and autonomous existence. [60]

In other words, viewed through this lens, women and children are Man's possessions; at his disposal and, thus, always at risk of being disposed of. Lately the news seems to abound with reports of fathers intentionally and violently taking the lives of their wives, ex-wives and/or

[60] Though the law defining the wife as a household chattel was superseded by more equitable laws in the late 1880s in Australia, it is arguable that the basis for such logic, deeply rooted in the male symbolic order, is ever-present.

children.[61] As if such lives were theirs to take. Regardless of the explicit laws which aim to protect the life of every human being, be they man, woman or child, the sense of man's ownership over his wife and children insidiously bestowed upon him in the west, and the volatile situation this creates, appears all too prevalent. And though it barely needs saying, no one truly benefits in this scenario – certainly not those men who, in maintaining their position as 'head' of the family, resort to slaughter in an effort to obtain the unquestioned rule promised them by the skewed order of the west.

Therefore, whether one is feeling vague undercurrents of discomfort or whether one is acutely alert to the assault of oppression - be they on the receiving or inflicting end - is arguably indicative of a culture wherein each one is situated along a spectrum of 'more-or-less' for which Man is the yardstick. That we need to abolish this yardstick for the sake of all who to varying degrees fall short of its impossible and, I would argue, undesirable standard is clear within Irigaray's thought. How this is to be done, Irigaray claims, first requires our return to the body. Bodies. Our first step, she argues, is to see past the reigning phallic phantasies and become reacquainted with the fleshly lines, strengths and vulnerabilities of our actual bodies. Which, though equally human, are at least two in kind. And thus, the bases of at least two kinds of language, two kinds of human culture.

Irigaray is asking us to perceive anew our sexuate dimorphism. That is, she asks us to comprehend it without mentally situating it in a hierarchical binary, which only serves to extinguish our sexed difference and reduce us to either better or worse versions of the Same. Rather, our sexuate dimorphism must be left conceptually undisturbed as the primary site of difference within human existence, so that each sex is always the other of the other – i.e., always fully human though never fully representative of all humanity.

So what is needed, as Irigaray makes clear, is indeed a return to our bodies, our first reality, so that we may begin an honest appraisal of how they align (or, rather, misalign) with the dominant culture of the west. In this way our ontology – the pre-laid foundation for our human becoming – which has been obscured for so long can re-emerge from the shadows. We are afforded the view that we are at least two. A two that exists independently of each other, with neither one

[61] For more on such reports, refer to the following: John Edwards (ABC, 2018); Chris Watts (Foody, 2018); Anthony Harvey (Carmody, September 2018); Peter Miles (Carmody, May 2018); Teancum Vernon Petersen-Crofts (Carmody, Collard, Piesse, 2018).

representing, merely, what the other is not. We are able to see that one's excess – those attributes that one does not want – is never resolved by shedding it onto the other, but remains forever within the boundaries of the one to whom it belongs.

With this reality-based understanding of ourselves – as ontologically distinct, but equally human – the transcendence of one sex is no longer achieved at the expense of the other. On the contrary, one's transcendence enables the transcendence of the other. At least two sexuately unique horizons within a greater, ever-expanding, shared horizon where the only negative is the space between the at least two positives of sexuate difference.

The way we use language, the way we build our cultures, would be radically different to what we know today in the west if we abolished the phallic imagery, eradicated the notion of the One over the many, and allowed ourselves to become what we are, in our sexuate difference, as always but a part of the whole. By following the contours of our differently sexed bodies honestly, fearlessly and in the spirit of love for the self and the other, we are capable of producing worlds where no one is vulnerable to dereliction, to homelessness – where the only standard is sexuate diversity and where the most important goal is to aid each other in becoming all that we can be.

Because we dwell in a society where human difference is obfuscated in favour of sameness – namely a realm comprised of the ideal human (Man) and its more-or-less imperfect copies – it is little wonder that each person's unrepeatable uniqueness is more regularly seen as a threat or a nuisance than a world-enriching phenomenon. In addition to one's sexed uniqueness, what specifically and often ineffably makes a man that man, a woman that woman, a person that person is permitted expression up to a point, before it then runs the risk of being placed on a spectrum ranging from socially disruptive to materially destructive. And no philosopher, I would argue, has identified and illuminated this fear of human plurality more acutely than Hannah Arendt.

In our western world where prescribed social norms dictate acceptable behaviour and conformism is generally encouraged over individuality, Arendt reminds us that 'nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live.' (Arendt, 1998: 8). That we are each utterly unique is not only inextricably bound up with the human condition – it is precisely that, more than anything else, which makes us human. Arendt's philosophy, thus, highlights the

absurdity, futility and inevitable oppressiveness of a politics which aims at suppressing difference in order to control it.

And the underlying western political goal of control is made very clear in Arendt's thought. For, as she points out, human difference – the inherent unknowability of each person – necessarily gives rise to unpredictability and creates a world awash with contingency. Since the time of Plato, the western response has always been to eradicate contingency, which in this mindset equates to chaos. Throughout western history, then, this fundamental aspect of the human condition has resulted in ideological and material practices that seek as much as possible to restrain, suppress and deny human difference.

Arendt shows us that it is an impossible endeavour to annihilate that which makes us human without annihilating humanity, and she offers an alternative political framework wherein human differences, and the contingencies inevitably borne from them, are a positive and desired feature of day to day life – simply because they are part and parcel of being human. Unlike many of her contemporaries who follow the same line of thinking as the forefathers of western philosophy, Arendt does not try and theorise each one's uniqueness out of existence by denying its reality. Rather, she starts from this reality when thinking about how we might live together in ways that both expand and enrich ourselves and our world. Radically, she suggests a worldview that is built around the fact of human plurality.

For in this framework, the expression of our unique self to multiple others is an invaluable source of enrichment – for both the actor, whose sense of self evolves and deepens through each act of self-expression, and for the spectators, who are afforded a glimpse through a perspective necessarily different from their own, thus allowing for the expansion of their own. Worldly horizons unfurl where each one is encouraged to share their particularity – to be and become who they uniquely are without fear of retribution or suppression.

Consequently, it is implicit in Arendt's political vision that acts of self-expression, the sharing of different opinions and perspectives, is humanising and world-expanding only where the basis of each thought and action is aligned with a world hospitable to plurality. One's freedom – one's right to be – is therefore conditional, for Arendt, upon the equal freedom and right to be of all others. Political ideologies which serve to enhance one's freedom at the expense of another's – which in Arendt's day were equally epitomised by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's

Russia – are merely versions of the reigning western notion wherein human difference is the antithesis of political order.

Plurality, for Arendt, is not the root of chaos. It is the basis of our humanness. That chaos and contingency accompany plurality is accepted by Arendt as an inevitable, if not always desirable part of life. Yet, she responds to this ever-present risk not with a wish to suppress human uniqueness and our capacity for spontaneous and unpredictable action, but rather, with the remedies of promise and forgiveness. Both such actions are accommodating of human plurality whilst abating, as much as possible, the potential for destruction that certain kinds of chaos can wreak. Arendt bestows upon us an ethical responsibility, as unique, spontaneous human actors, to promise one another not to intentionally act in ways that diminish human plurality and to seek forgiveness where our actions have encroached on the humanness of others.

Promise and forgiveness are the ways in which Arendt conceptually builds a political structure around the reality of our plurality. It is a political structure wherein each one has the unquestionable right to exist and, furthermore, is encouraged to express their truths not in spite of, but because of their particular sex, race, religion, class, caste, sexuality, etc. – i.e., their particular place in the world. But, even more so, because of each one's unrepeatable uniqueness – always embodied, always sexed – that both shapes and transcends all such social categories.

Thus, the various oppressions that exist in the west, whether they impinge on one minimally or unreservedly, are able to continue unabated due to an order which ultimately aims to cloak and silence the fact of each one's unrepeatable uniqueness for the sake of control by a few. In such a circumstance, the social categories we use to make sense of each other and ourselves not only become the only avenues for identity formation, but their boundaries are excessively rigid and suffocatingly tight. There is little opportunity for one to push the boundaries of what it means to be a man, a woman, gay, straight, black, white, etc., where Man is the standard against which we are all held. Man: elite, white, heterosexual, associated with Judeo-Christianity, and unquestioned master of his domain. And there is seemingly no opportunity to destabilise the implicit ranking of such social categories which reduce a person's worth the further they sit from Man as the yardstick of humanness.

Together, Irigaray and Arendt have identified the inequities and oppressions within western culture as rooted in phantastical and deeply oppressive notions of human sameness. Irigaray

illuminates the covert phallic contours of the reigning model of humanity and, in doing so, reveals the erasure of the female sex within western thought. Arendt clarifies the current situation wherein our individual uniquenesses, that which makes us human, is repeatedly constrained and denied lest it debunk the idea that Man, and not an infinitely diverse range of unique human beings, inhabits the earth. Both Irigaray and Arendt reveal different aspects of, what is at its heart, the one problem. We need to be free to be and become who we uniquely are as ontologically plural human beings, but to do this we first need to acknowledge that there are at least two sexes, two possible cultures, which make up humankind.

That is, by looking at the thought of Irigaray and Arendt together, we are able to most clearly discern that we cannot fully access or embrace our plurality until each sex is afforded equal shelter in our shared world. Equally we can see that what it means to be a woman or a man cannot be given the endless horizons needed in order to develop without there also being a platform wherein each one can share their unique perspective as an unrepeatable, irreplaceable, always sexuately specific human being.

In taking this philosophical turn, i.e., creating an ethic where Irigarayan sexuate difference and Arendtian plurality equally form its centre, we are also able to dispel the common criticisms levelled at each thinker. Irigaray is not an essentialist – certainly not in the sense of biological reductionism. Nor does her framework exclude certain strands of diversity – for instance, same-sex orientation or intersexed bodily specificity. Rather, she sets up the foundations for an ethical way of life where we can each become without limits yet, at the same time, without losing our being in a language that cannot properly account for it. In other words, Irigaray's foundations allow us to each become who we are – never fully classifiable, always fully human.

Equally, Arendt has no masculine bias. Despite appearances, her model of the human is not male. It is, in a sense, unformed. The question of sexuate difference is not what she is grappling with. Yet, as we have seen, her framework is entirely conducive to this elemental aspect of our humanness forming the basis of her desired ethic: plurality. In other words, Arendt's appeal to us that each one's uniqueness be allowed and encouraged to come to the fore and contribute to the building of our shared world, is no less an appeal that we each look to ourselves, in our specific, sexed morphology, in identifying all the things that make each individual that individual and not another.

That is, one cannot reveal who one is in one's uniqueness without also acknowledging their embodied existence as a specifically sexed being – and then defining what that means in their own perspective, free from the preconceptions of those who embody a different sex and, thus, have a different lived experience of what it means to be human. In such a world, where each one's reality is granted unqualified credence, where each one can endlessly become who they uniquely are without forgoing their equal right to a full claim to humanity, ethical relations can flourish. Happiness, as Irigaray in particular reminds us, can flourish. Between human beings certainly, but also between human beings and all other non-human earthly life with which we share the planet and upon which we rely for basic life, sustenance, and joy. That is to say that in such a world, each one's newfound perspective and acceptance of their corporeality and, hence, their interconnectedness with all that is, could not but instil within us feelings of gratitude towards the corporeal world in its entirety: our home, the earth, and the infinite and miraculous diversity of abounding life contained within it.

Consequently, my thesis is not simply an exoneration of Arendt and Irigaray within the eyes of certain of their critics. Most importantly, my desire is to convey that their combined thought creates a new feminist ethic that aids us in thinking our way beyond the present order where oppression is rife, and thus radically reforming it without annihilating life in the process. Accordingly, it is not necessary to 'break eggs to make an omelette'. An omelette – the smash and scramble of life's most potent symbol – has no place as a metaphor for ethical thought or action. It is not an omelette we need to make. What we urgently need is to find a way back to ourselves – to reverse the estrangement that has come to characterise human lived experience. The feminist ethic of sexuate plurality introduced by way of this thesis has the capacity to remedy such harms. It reminds us that life is a creative process. It is not just about doing the least harm, it is about living life to the fullest. Becoming all that we can be. It is a positive ethic and one which promotes the flourishing physical and spiritual fulfilment of all human kinds.

References

ABC. (2018, July 6). *Pennant Hills shooting: Sydney father who shot dead children 'planned' the attack, police say.* Retrieved from ABC News: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-06/pennant-hills-shooting-of-teens-sydney-father-planned-attack/9947470

Arendt, H. (1976). *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt.

Arendt, H. (1978). *The Life of the Mind.* Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Inc.

Arendt, H. (1983). *Men in Dark Times.* San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Arendt, H. (1992). Letter to Karl Jaspers of 13 April 1965. In L. Kohler, & H. Saner, *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969* (pp. 591-594). Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Arendt, H. (1993). *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought.* New York and London: Penguin Books.

Arendt, H. (1994). Understanding and Politics. In J. (. Kohn, *Essays in Understanding* (pp. 307-323). New York: Schocken Books.

Arendt, H. (1994a). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* New York: Penguin.

Arendt, H. (1994b). *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism.* New York: Schocken.

Arendt, H. (1998). *The Human Condition.* Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H. (2003). *Responsibility and Judgment.* New York: Random House.

Beauvoir, S. d. (1976). *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* New York: Citadel Press.

Beauvoir, S. d. (2011). *The Second Sex.* London: Vintage.

Beiner, R. (2007). Arendt and Nationalism. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 44-62). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Benhabib, S. (2007). Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 65-85). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bernstein, R. J. (2007). Arendt on thinking. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 277-292). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Birmingham, P. (No. 33, 2003). The Pleasure of Your Company: Arendt, Kristeva, and an Ethic of Public Happiness. *Research in Phenomenology*, 53-73.

Boissoneault, L. (2017, August 31). *A Brief History of Book Burning, From the Printing Press to Internet Archives.* Retrieved from Smithsonian.com: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/brief-history-book-burning-printing-press-internet-archives-180964697/

Brightman, C. (1995). Introduction: An Epistolary Romance. In C. Brightman, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949-1975* (pp. vii-xxx). Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Brison, S. J. (2003). Beauvoir and feminism: interview and reflections. In C. Card, *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (pp. 189-207). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canovan, M. (1977). *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt.* London: University Paperback.

Canovan, M. (1995). *Hannah Arendt: a reinterpretation of her political thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canovan, M. (1998). Introduction. In H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (pp. vii-xx). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Canovan, M. (2007). Arendt's theory of totalitarianism. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 25-43). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carmody, C. P. (2018, July 16). *Ellenbrook murder inquiry: Teen charged with killing mother and her two children.* Retrieved from ABC News: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-16/man-charged-with-murders-of-mother-two-children-in-ellenbrook/9997552

Carmody, J. (2018, September 11). *Bedford mass murder: Family breaks silence after Anthony Harvey charged with five murders.* Retrieved from ABC News: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-11/bedford-mass-murders-distraught-family-releases-statement/10230514

Carmody, J. (2018, May 14). *Margaret River murder-suicide: Peter Miles's heartache blamed for unspeakable violence.* Retrieved from ABC News: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-14/margaret-river-murder-suicide-peter-miles-pain-behind-killings/9756918

Cavarero, A. (1995). *In Spite of Plato.* Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press.

Cavarero, A. (2005). *For More Than One Voice.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Cavarero, A. (2006). *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and selfhood.* Oxon and New York: Routledge.

D'Entreves, M. P. (2007). Arendt's theory of judgment. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 245-260). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Dietz, M. G. (2007). Arendt and the Holocaust. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 86-109). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Euben, J. P. (2007). Arendt's Hellenism. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 151-164). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

European Environment Agency. (2015, February 18). *Increasing environmental pollution (GMT 10).* Retrieved from European Environment Agency: https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2015/global/pollution

Foody, K. (2018, August 21). *Chris Watts, accused of killing family, appears in court.* Retrieved from ABC 13 Eyewitness News: https://abc13.com/chris-watts-accused-of-killing-family-appears-in-court/4019307/

Fry, K. A. (2009). *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed.* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Fullbrook, S., & Fullbrook, K. (1998). *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Glenza, J. &. (2018, June 30). *These 24 states could ban abortion in two years.* Retrieved from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/jun/30/abortion-supreme-court-law-anthony-kennedy

Grosz, E. (1998). *Jaques Lacan: A feminist introduction.* New York, London: Routledge.

Hayden, P. (2014). Introduction: Illuminating Hannah Arendt. In P. Hayden, *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts* (pp. 1-19). Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.

Holmes, E. A. (2013). The Gift of Breath: Towards a Maternal Pnuematology. In E. A. Holmes, & L. Skof, *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (pp. 36-49). London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Honig, B. (. (1995). *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt.* University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One.* New York: Cornell University.

Irigaray, L. (1991). *Marine Lover.* New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1992). *Elemental Passions.* London: The Athlone Press Ltd.

Irigaray, L. (1993). *Sexes and Genealogies.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1994). Volume without contours. In M. Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (pp. 53-67). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Irigaray, L. (1994a). *Speculum of the Other Woman.* New York & London: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1995). The Question of the Other. In L. Huffer, *Yale French Studies: No. 87* (pp. 7-19). New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Irigaray, L. (1996). *i love to you.* London and New York: Routledge.

Irigaray, L. (1999). *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger.* Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Irigaray, L. (2002a). *between east and west: from singularity to community.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Irigaray, L. (2002b). *the Way of Love.* London and New York: Continuum.

Irigaray, L. (2004). *Everyday Prayers.* Paris : Maisonneuve and Larose.

Irigaray, L. (2004a). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* London: Continuum.

Irigaray, L. (2004b). *Key Writings.* London and New York: Continuum.

Irigaray, L. (2007). *Je, Tu, Nous.* New York: Routledge.

Irigaray, L. (2008). *Sharing the World.* London and New York: Continuum.

Irigaray, L. (2013). *In the Beginning She Was.* London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Irigaray, L. (2015). Starting from Ourselves as Living Beings. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 46, No. 2, p101-108.

Irigaray, L. (2016). Luce Irigaray. In L. Irigaray, & M. Marder, *Through Vegetal Being* (pp. 3-107). New York, Chincester and West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Jay, N. (1981). Gender and Dichotomy. *Feminist Studies*, 38-56.

Kateb, G. (2007). Political action: its nature and advantages. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 130-148). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kristeva, J. (1981 (Vol. 7, No. 1, Autumn)). Women's Time. *Signs*, 13-35.

Kruks, S. (1987). Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom. *Social Text*, No. 17, Autumn, Duke University Press, p111-112.

Lang, H. (2017, July 24). *There's Water Inside the Moon—More Than We Thought.* Retrieved from National Geographic: https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/07/water-moon-formed-volcanoes-glass-space-science/

Lipstadt, D. (2016). *Denying The Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory.* United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Mauk, B. (2013, January 28). *Why Can't We Reach The End Of The Rainbow?* Retrieved from Live Science: http://www.livescience.com/32455-why-cant-we-reach-the-end-of-the-rainbow.html

Mautner, T. (2005). *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy.* London: Penguin Books.

Maybee, J. E. (2016, June 3). *Hegel's Dialectics.* Retrieved from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/

McCarthy, M. (1995). Letter to Hannah Arendt dated 9 June 1971. In C. Brightman, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy* (pp. 296-298). Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Moi, T. (1999). *What is a Woman? And Other Essays.* Oxford: University Press.

Mrovlje, M. (2014). Narrating and Understanding. In P. Hayden, *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts* (pp. 66-84). Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited.

Pitkin, H. F. (August 1981, Vol. 9, No. 3). Justice: On Relating Private and Public. *Political Theory*, 327-352.

Plato. (1997). *Plato Complete Works.* Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Rich, A. (1979). *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: selected prose 1966-1978.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.

Stone, A. (2006). *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference.* New York: Cambrige University Press.

Taminiaux, J. (2007). Athens and Rome. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 165-177). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tatman, L. (2007). *Numinous Subjects.* Canberra, ACT: ANU Press.

Tatman, L. (2010). Ruminations on Time (2005-2009). *Cultural Studies Review*, 344-55.

Tatman, L. (2011). Telling Time Together: Hannah Arendt and the Temporal Condition of Human Beings in the World. *Judgement, Responsiblity and the Life-World: 28-29 November 2011* (pp. 69-73). Perth, Australia: Murdoch University.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Josef Mengele. (2018, October 6). Retrieved from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/josef-mengele

Villa, D. (2007). The development of Arendt's political thought. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hanna Arendt* (pp. 1-21). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Waldron, J. (2007). Arendt's constitutional politics. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 201-219). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wellmer, A. (2007). Arendt on revolution. In D. Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 220-241). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Whitford, M. (1991). *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine.* London and New York: Routledge.

Young-Bruehl, E. (1982). *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.